# CHRISTIAN FAITH AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

HALFORD E. LUCCOCK

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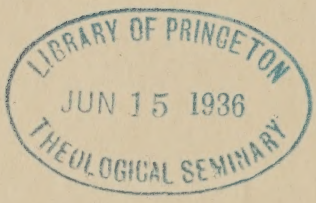


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# CHRISTIAN FAITH
## AND
# ECONOMIC CHANGE

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Divinity School

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LUCCOCK
CHRISTIAN FAITH AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

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To Natalie

With Gratitude and Love

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## Chapter I

## THE YEAR ONE

### I

A MUCH-USED and reliable device of fantastic fiction has been to give the hero of the tale a magical blow on the head which projects him into the midst of some distant century. Turning the calendar upside down always offers allurement to the imagination. Mark Twain catapulted his Connecticut Yankee across ten centuries to land breathless in King Arthur's Court. H. G. Wells has been a man of mighty blows; he has knocked both his heroes and the calendar into a cocked hat. In his *Men Like Gods* he runs an automobile against a convenient tree, and the resulting concussion of the brain lands the victim into the F dimension, three thousand years ahead. In *The Time Machine* he disdains so small a jump and tosses a man eight hundred thousand years ahead. The scheme works equally well in reverse, as in Upton Sinclair's *Roman Holiday,* in which a well-arranged smashup takes an American business magnate back into the days of the Roman emperors (among whom, incidentally, he found himself quite at home).

If only the fantasy could be moved over into the realm of reality! For among the many boons which the world needs is the invention of some kind of a

blow which will knock men, not into a remote century, but squarely into the middle of the first half of the twentieth century. That would be a miracle! To be specific, we might name the exact year into which men need to be knocked—1936.

For in the whole contemporary landscape—social, economic, and political—it is the milling around of different centuries, jostling one another, bumping, trampling, continually staging murderous head-on collisions, that is a root cause of confusion and chaos. We have a way of speaking, usually with poorly concealed patronage, of the Southern highlanders, who have been pocketed in the Appalachian Mountains, as "our contemporary Ancestors." But we do not need to journey to Tennessee or North Carolina to meet our "contemporary Ancestors." We bump into them every time the traffic light changes. They are everywhere. They walk the streets, work in the factories, fill the Chambers of Commerce. They teach in our schools and colleges. They rule—and ruin—the disarmament conferences.

It has grown to be the tritest of commonplaces that different realms of life move at appallingly different rates of speed. The technical, industrial world shoots forward like an airplane; the ideas that control it stumble along in an oxcart. The seventeenth century sits down with the twentieth at an economic or diplomatic conference; and both are crowded out by the man of the old stone age. William McFee, writing recently of poetry, stressed the anachronism and futility of poets dealing with airplanes, radios,

subways, and skyscrapers in eighteenth-century idiom. But such clashes of the centuries in literature do not leave the tragic trail of blight, desolation, and death which similar clashes in economics and politics leave.

For some people, of course, what is euphemistically called the "Depression" of the last six years, has been exactly such a blow, knocking them into the twentieth century, lifting them out of a mental citizenship in the social and political ideas of other centuries, from the nineteenth back to genuine B. C. It is even true that, to some extent, the piling up of the economic machine against a telegraph pole, with the wreckage strewn all over the world's map, has caused a fractured skull for the world in general, with some projection to a date nearer today. We have had a fresh demonstration on a rather large scale of the pedagogic axiom that "thinking begins with a pain." It is when we get some personal shock in our own organism, or a jolt from an outward mechanism, a sudden stop, dislocation or breakdown, that we begin to raise questions about its nature and structure. The pious attitude gives way, in part, at least, to the critical, and thinking begins.

How much of a saving jolt to the head has actually been produced during the present years of pain, is, of course, not evident today. The next decade may show more questioning of accepted axioms in economics and politics than either those on the economic left or right realize. Even to the eyes of hope, however, indications do not justify the judgment

that much of the world has been pitched into the type of social and economic thinking which fits our twentieth-century means of production. There is much more mental paralysis or the "thinking below the neck" of mere emotional reaction than of critical scrutiny of the assumptions of our present order of life.

Now, of course, it is always a good idea to become as contemporaneous with the calendar as possible. But for our particular decade or generation the necessity of bringing our thinking on human relations into the same century with the realities of the achieved technical basis of our civilization is enormously increased. It has been thus increased by the fact, for which there is a great convergence of evidence, that we are on one of the great watersheds of history. History, to be sure, cannot be marked off neatly with clear thin lines like meridians of longitude on a pasteboard globe. Dean Inge says pertinently, "It is the business of the historian to carve history at the joints."[1] But what if there are no "joints"? No particular year will show where to cleave the "joint." Yet history does show "joints," when a whole complex of forces has become exhausted, and new momentums and patterns have inevitably taken their place. It takes a long time to realize that such a juncture has been reached and passed. Anatole France has well described that process as it has happened in other great birthdays of history: "The timid man dreads as a future

[1] *The Post-Victorians.*

cataclysm a change which began before his birth, which is going on under his eyes, though he does not see it, and which will become apparent a century hence." That sentence describes the fall of Rome, the senility and exhaustion of feudalism. It describes our own time. Multitudes of the "timid" are today dreading as a vast new portent the inevitable working out of changes which have been resistlessly operating from before their birth and are now going on beneath their blind eyes. Time is being carved at a "joint."

An alien criminal was being held in 1933 by United States authorities for deportation to the land of his birth. The Commissioner of Labor was at a loss where to send him. For he came from the checkerboard of Southeastern Europe, and, as the alien repeatedly explained to the puzzled officers, the land of his birth had "slid off the map" since the war. That might be said with equal truth of any of us. The land of our birth has slid off the map. It is no longer there. It is not the same country. The rocks and rills of our nostalgic devotion, the woods and templed hills are there physically. But the quality of the world that went with them has slid away.

It is not merely the truism that we are living in a changing order. That has always been true, always will be. "Change" is only another word for "life." We are at a much more definite "joint," a time of such shifting of life and its processes to new bases, such definite arrivals at the end of blind alleys and

the opening up of new traffic ways of intellectual and social experiment, as not only to justify but to compel a new chapter heading. Today cannot be punctuated with a comma, but only with an emphatic period, an exclamation point, a question mark, and a new page.

Specifically, the dominant patterns of our organized life have become so out of relation to the technical framework and foundation of that life that they have reached the point of exhaustion. The date 1914, with its logical aftermath in the twenty-two years which have followed, will always stand as the ridge from which that unfitness of nineteenth-century capitalism, with the ethical, religious, and political theory which it created to buttress itself, became highly visible, like some vast geological fault running through the earth.

David Lloyd George, in a mood of Welsh poetical imagination in his memoirs, describes listening to Big Ben, the bell on the Parliament Buildings, boom out the strokes of twelve midnight, on the August night, 1914, on which Great Britain declared war on Germany. He says that the solemn clang of Boom! Boom! seemed to be metamorphosed into Doom! Doom! as the last strokes were sounded.[2] He heard correctly. It *was* Doom. It was doom to the whole accepted system of life which had flowered in so great a catastrophe.

It is not to be forgotten that every age has been

[2] *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George.* Little, Brown, and Company, Boston, 1933.

possessed by an Ancient-Mariner complex, feeling strongly that it has entered into unparalleled newness of situation and horizon. Every age has thought to itself,

> "We were the first that ever burst
> Into that silent sea."

One can find, for instance, in every decade in the past hundred years, solemn recordings of the consciousness that a new era of history had opened because within that decade the utmost limits in speed of transportation and communication had been reached. In 1835 a commencement speaker at a New-England college told the graduates that they were "stepping out into a world of volcanic upheaval." It is rather hard today to see any traces of a terrestrial volcano in 1835. True, Andrew Jackson had been President of the United States for seven years, and no doubt, to a New Englander, that seemed the end of the world. It was the end of the neat, cozy, federalist world which preceded Jackson, that terrifying symbol of a "vulgar" democracy. Certainly, things of importance happened in 1835. But there was nothing to give even a tremor to the expanding industrialism which was just in its ascendancy and was to dominate all the nooks and corners of life for a century.

It is a vastly different sort of "volcanic upheaval" today. That same profit-driven industrialism, though possessed of mechanical marvels beyond the dream of 1835, is no longer climbing the sky. There has

been a cumulative demonstration, rolling along with the logical force of geometry, of the unfitness of traditional economic institutions and philosophy to serve the needs of men and society, basic needs which cannot be, for any considerable stretch of time, denied. In many ways we have been living under an economic and social philosophy two hundred years behind the present necessities of a secure civilization, and nineteen hundred years behind Jesus. And as if a last clinching Q. E. D. to that proposition were needed, the clash of rival imperialisms over the rape of Ethiopia has furnished it.

We have come to a Year One—an initial stretch of a period to be freshly dated, with breakup of settled patterns and the disturbing emergence of new forces. Expressed recognitions that we are in a Year One could be tiresomely multiplied. They follow the general line of the words of Alfred North Whitehead, words already become classic:

"The whole of this our tradition is warped by the vicious assumption that each generation will substantially live amid the conditions governing the lives of its fathers and will transmit these conditions to mold with equal force the lives of its children. We are living in the first period of human history for which this assumption is false."[3]

The same judgment by Whitehead appears in another place: "Mankind is in one of its rare moods of shifting its outlook. The mere compulsion of

[3]Wallace B. Donham, *Business Adrift.* With introduction by Alfred North Whitehead. McGraw-Hill Co., New York, 1931.

tradition has lost its force. It is the business of philosophers, students, and practical men, to recreate and re-enact a vision of the world, including those elements of reverence and order without which society lapses into riot. . . . We must produce a great age or see the collapse of the upward striving of our race."[4]

A way of life and organization, individualistic in ethics, and in economics, with the accompanying nationalism in international relations, a belated hangover from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has been shown unfit to serve the complexities of the twentieth century and is progressively demonstrating its inability to furnish security to personal, national, or international life. The most fitting symbol of this inability is nature's crowning exhibit of inability to adapt to a changing environment, the brontosaurus. The late unlamented brontosaurus had a body of seventy tons with a brain the size of a hen's egg. The proportions are just about the same in the titanic structure of much of our present order, whether manifested in a military machine or the artificial creation of scarcity in an era of potential abundance—seventy tons of matter to a few ounces of brain.

## II

To grant that our days may be called a Year One of a real turn in the long lane of history, is by no

[4] Wallace B. Donham, *Business Adrift*. With introduction by Alfred North Whitehead. McGraw-Hill Co., New York, 1931.

means to claim knowledge of what a Year Two or Three will be like, to say nothing of a Year Forty or Four Hundred. It was a wise and weary man who said not long ago, "The future has not yet been born, so let's not baptize it." A great many voluntary baptisms of the future have been held, but it is hard to see how anyone, with any extensive awareness of clashing forces today, could essay to give a definite name to the future. Indeed, one of the interesting features of the contemporary trend in radical circles is a heretical skepticism on the cardinal dogma of the "inevitability" of Communism. John Chamberlain reaches out to the realm of theology for adequate terms to describe that movement of thought. He says that "Arminianism" is gaining on orthodox "Calvinism" among Marxist groups. There has been a wavering on foreordination; an emphasis on "free will." In other words, there is less assurance that the present breakdown of capitalist machinery will be inevitably the prelude to a Communist society. That result depends on effort as well as the stars. There is not only the reality of entrenched and expanding Fascism; there are also the real alternatives of chaos and barbarism.

One need not have a chart of the future, with which to answer the loud challenge to stand and deliver, to feel convinced that there is sufficient evidence at hand that our present order of society is so hobbled by its own contradictions that no permanent recovery or permanent continuance is possible on the basis of its own principles. Indices of trade

revival and profits may go up. A quite general temporary recovery may occur. But it is hard to see any ground for reasonable expectation of permanent adequate functioning of the present stalled machinery. A generation ago a British philosopher wrote, "It has been the function of the nineteenth century to liberate; it will be the function of the twentieth century to control." That strikes to the center of the problem of the continuance of the dominant motivation and economic organization of society. It cannot control, it cannot plan, sufficiently to provide a means of general human welfare and still remain itself. It can control production, while distribution goes bankrupt. This conviction is growing in many minds, not as a result nor from an initial act of faith in accepting a dogma, but from experience. It is a process much like that so vividly described by John Buchan as taking place in the mind of Cromwell when struggling to reach a settled conviction and policy. "His sluggish, conservative mind was forced by the unfamiliar tortures of thought, and slowly, by a process of trial and error, was driven to conclusions against which all his instincts revolted, but which were forced on his soul by the inexorable pressure of facts."[5] Many minds during this decade are making the same Pilgrim's Progress over the same rough road, driven "by the inexorable pressure of facts."

In 1789 Gouverneur Morris, at that time one of

[5] John Buchan, *Oliver Cromwell.* Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1934.

the first American "unofficial observers" in Europe, wrote from Paris to George Washington giving his impressions of Louis XVI. "He is an amiable and upright man," Morris wrote, "and doubtless would have made a fine minister in peace time. But unfortunately his ancestors have bequeathed him a revolution." That comment from the eve of the French Revolution is very pertinent to many of the institutions of society today. Our ancestors, immediate and remote, have bequeathed us, not certainly a revolution already made, but the necessity for a revolution. That word "revolution" is not used here or elsewhere in this book in the sense of warfare which follows any historical pattern, French or Russian. It denotes a transfer of power, a structural economic change, by which power is transferred from proportionately small groups, which have been able to make the decisions conditioning the lives of millions and the destinies of nations, to social control, to be used not for private profit but for use and welfare so that all who have taken part in the production of the wealth may have a just share in it.

## III

What of the Christian Church in a Year One? For one thing, it could well remember, what multitudes of the timid and frightened within it seem to have completely forgotten, that the Church was born in a Year One. A changing social order is the native land of Christianity. The Christian faith and Church were born into a world which had a

death rattle in its throat. An old order was dying and a new one was coming to birth. The signs of a decaying senility were not insistently evident. Indeed, when the first Christian missionaries came into the Graeco-Roman world, it had a deceptive luxuriance. But it was the luxuriance of autumn, not of spring. That world had within it no secret of renewal to withstand the gathering forces of winter. The new creation, the Christian Church, had its birth and growth in a world the fashion of which was changing, a world just beginning to go through one of the great convulsions of history. So that it ought not to be disconcerting, if we preserve any historical memory, to find the Church set in the midst of an earthquake, amid forces making for change more far reaching and profound than the breakup of the Roman Empire. The question which the years ahead will answer for the Church is the crucial one of whether the Church has become so enervated by adjustment to static conditions that it is unfitted to play the dynamic rôle of its early history in being a factor and molding force in great social change. For it is inconceivable that the Church can be a major influence in the emerging conditions of today and tomorrow unless it finds in its message and life a far closer relevance to the most significant areas of human experience. Secretary Henry A. Wallace has coined a stinging phrase which might well be burned into the consciousness and conscience of the Church. In his *Statesmanship and Religion* he exclaims, after looking at the placid

routine of so much traditional church organization, "The truly dismaying thing is the wishy-washy, goody-goodness, *the infantile irrelevancy* of the Church itself." The words are harsh, but no gentle words can accurately mirror the thing they describe. That sentence does not reflect the warped and blind judgment that the creative influence of religion on individual personality is mere goody-goodness, or that theology, religion's interpretation of reality, is irrelevant to the needs of humanity, but that so often those resources are brought into no close and living contact with the dominant social forces of today. A religion whose forces are not brought into such contact must inevitably resign any ambition to remain a major power in its world. There is much for a church to ponder in the statement of Lyford P. Edwards, in *The Natural History of Revolution,* that "it usually takes three generations of intense disillusionment to undermine inherited loyalties." The traditional loyalties of many to the Church have been and are continually being undermined by an intense disillusionment over the irrelevance of much of organized Christianity today to the decisive battles for human freedom. Who can deny that over large areas the Church is going on the momentum of "inherited loyalties," which progressively may grow thinner and thinner under the impact of the feeling that it is on the fringe of society rather than in the midst of its central struggles?

In this connection a haunting line from the hymn beginning, "God of the Prophets, bless the prophets'

sons," has disturbing and alluring suggestions. It is the line which declares "Each age its solemn task can claim but once." Is it true? Did ages of history have "solemn tasks" which were particularly and peculiarly theirs, which, if they were not grasped and done, were not accomplished at all? There is much in history which bears out the truth of that line of poetry. Some of these tasks were claimed in the only age in which they could be claimed, such as the spread of Christianity through the Roman Empire, the determining of the character of the settlement of North America. It is interesting to let the imagination play with what "solemn tasks" that different ages have missed while the opportunity passed. Once started on that trail, the imagination must go on to ask, Is there a "solemn task" of our age; a solemn task of the Church of our time, which is peculiarly ours, that cannot be postponed to future centuries? For the Church, is not the solemn task, in an age, in Whitehead's words, "of vast shifting to new foundations," to strive with all its heart, mind, and strength, to provide definite Christian foundations for that emerging new order?

Such an undertaking does not imply a new faith, or a new journey at a tangent to basic Christian experience and belief, or the discovery of new resources. It calls, rather, for making explicit what is implicit in the Christian revelation. Kenneth Kirk has pointed out that in times of the disintegration of a social order, such as in the first Christian centuries and in our own time, a curiosity and apprehen-

sion about the future is uppermost in men's minds. "What is the world coming to?" is a common question, he says. Then he follows with a profound observation. He says that the Christian evangelists came into that Roman world proclaiming that men were asking the wrong question. The real question to be asked is not, "What is the world coming to?" but, "What *has come* to the world?" The Christians thought they knew the answer to that question: God had come to the world in Christ. The divine action was the ground of the world's hope.

Again in a time of disintegration that same affirmation is a word of salvation. But it is a word of salvation to those who believe, that is, to those who accept and work out its implications for all the reaches of human life.

One aspect of the truth that our time is a day of flood tide for Christianity is seen in the fact that basic issues in national and international life have moved definitely and more visibly than ever before into the moral and spiritual realm. Eras of geographical and technical pioneering have been succeeded by one where the "hot spot" is in the field of human relationships. The very breakdown has accelerated the shift from material adventure to social and spiritual adventure. For a church to refuse to deal with issues which have literally been dumped in its lap would be an unforgivable betrayal of stewardship. This recognition of the moral and spiritual character of the dominant concerns of society is made on every hand. Here is Professor Sumner H. Slichter,

of Harvard, writing in his textbook, *Modern Economic Society,* "How to make industry more of a tool and less of a tyrant; how to prevent the process of making a living from interfering with the opportunity and capacity of men to lead the good life; how, indeed, to make the process of getting a living a part of the good life itself—these are the supreme economic problems."[6] Where could one find a sharper statement of the fact that in our mechanized world of today economic problems and political problems are supremely spiritual problems? Charles A. Beard has given the same picture of economic breakdown as coming from essentially ethical problems: "The source of our confusion is our contemptuous disregard of ethics. What ought to be, given our situation, what is just, right, fair, supremely gratifying and beautiful, is thrust aside. The grand conceptions which have inspired millions are swept into the discard by economists as futile, if not foolish, and by the Communists as bourgeois prejudices."[7] For that jaunty contempt of ethics we have incurred the inescapable penalty of the jamming of the machinery. For that is the kind of a moral universe we live in.

If a church will accept the imperatives of this Year One, and follow wherever they lead, it will find more than it immediately seeks. It will find new growing points for the historic Christian faith.

[6] Sumner H. Slichter, *Modern Economic Society.* Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1931.
[7] *Scribner's Magazine,* December, 1931.

## Chapter II

# PRONOUNCE OR PERISH

### I

ONE of the unforgettable stories of the Old Testament which has worked its way into the common speech of all lands is that recorded in the book of Judges, describing the ruthless slaughter at the fords of the Jordan over the pronunciation of a word. The hapless Ephraimites were told to pronounce the word "shibboleth," and when they failed to do so correctly, were slain.

That story from Israel's age of iron, when "every man did what was right in his eyes," has many points pertinent to our own time. In these days of Nazi deification of race myths, for instance, the story might be cited as an early purge to preserve "race purity." Although it must be confessed that "der Feuhrer" of the Israelites, Jephthah, was at least applying to his victims a much more objective standard than "Aryanism." The most striking relationship of the story to today, however, lies in the simple alternative offered to the Ephraimites—"Pronounce or Perish." The march of contemporary history has been spelling out, in progressively clearer letters, that same alternative for the world. The word of doom is not any strange sibilant, difficult for unaccustomed lips and tongue to vocalize, but a far more familiar

and more difficult word. The word which the world, in fragments and in whole, must learn to pronounce is the greatest and most troublesome word in any language—*We*. Unless men learn to pronounce that word "we," as more than a faint murmur, they face infinitely greater disaster than that of forty-two thousand lost, as reported in the book of Judges.

In these days of blatant nationalisms and imperialisms clashing once more, few even of the blindest require the truth of that alternative, "Learn to say WE or perish," to be labored. It is just as painfully true within political borders, in the economic and social life of a people. In every direction we see the human devastation coming from an economic way of life which could not, or would not, say "We" in any clarity and volume convincing enough to save itself. For six years we have looked out on an economic landscape, torn

> "As though an earthquake
> Smacked its mumbling lips
> O'er some thick-peopled city."

No lesser word than "we" will suffice. The economic stalemate of today is startlingly parallel to the much-loved story of our childhood Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. The door to the treasure cave would swing for just one word—"Open Sesame." Other words were tried in vain: "Open Wheat," "Open Barley." (Indeed, if one wished to try to push the analogy on all fours, it could be pointed out that through the A. A. A. the Roosevelt administration

has tried to open the doors of recovery by pronouncing loudly those same agricultural words, "Open Wheat!" "Open Barley!" "Open Cotton!" But there has been little legerdemain in them.) One word only will move the hinges—"We."

Our panic of plenty, an age of abundance issuing in wide distress, has compelled the raising of fundamental questions. Edwin Arlington Robinson has put the insistent inquiry:

> "What does it mean, this barren age of ours?
> Here are the men, the women, and the flowers,
> The seasons and the sunset, as before.
> What does it mean?"

The word "we" is not totally unknown in this day of strident shouting. No word booms through the air more often or more loudly. It is the holy word of nationalism. "We need a place in the sun," cries Mussolini, echoing Wilhelm the Second. "We are one soul and one mind," he barks out at the Italian people and the world, and the vociferousness of the shouting only makes more evident the lie. The "we" means *me,* and the clusters of *me's,* groups claiming the larger pronoun for their own interest. We hear the same shout in the creed of the Liberty League here in the United States, proclaiming a pious devotion to the *status quo,* "under which we have prospered as has no other nation in the world." *We* have prospered! Who are the *we* who have prospered? Are they the fifteen millions who have made up the long, aching queue on public relief? Are they the

sixty per cent of the population, who even at the so-called peak of prosperity in 1929 (that mythical golden day to which we look back as the ancients looked back to a reputed golden age), who had an income of two thousand dollars a year or less—sixty per cent of all the so-called *we*—precariously perched a few inches above the level of the minimum requirement of decent living for a family?

The nation has reached a point in its history suggestive of that tense moment in the life and adventures of Robinson Crusoe, when he discovered the footprint of another man. If we are to go on to a genuine security, we must discover the footprints, not of one person, but of one hundred and thirty million people. Nothing less than the primacy of the common welfare will serve as a sure basis for economic living together. In the light of those footprints of the one hundred and thirty million, must be shaped the planning of our national housekeeping, if the machinery, geared inextricably to mass production, is to function adequately.

## II

A Church in whose charter is the affirmation, "We are members one of another," must, if it is to preserve its sense of vocation, accept the task of helping a world to learn to say that word of salvation, "we." The task of setting the imperative of common welfare squarely at the center of our economy brings a day of visitation, both gracious and terrible; gracious in the opportunity it presents, terrible in the respon-

sibility it imposes. That responsibility is a previous question, an order of the day, both unfinished business and new business. This conviction will be explored in later pages of this book; but in the present setting it must suffice to say that the avenue to a vital Christian faith and experience today starts from a clear sight of the ethical realities of our industrial and commercial life and an honest dealing with them. One real cause of the creeping paralysis which has seized so much of organized Christianity today has been the divorce between religion and economics. Such an unlawful alienation is inevitably followed by a fatal chasm between religion and individual morality. Such ethical realism is not in itself a gospel; but it must be central to a Church's intellectual seizure of its environment and task if it is to fulfill its mission even to individual life.

## III

That necessary realistic grapple with facts may safely begin with the mild assertion that our present form of capitalist economy fails to serve the needs of society. There is no necessity for beginning with the dogmatic prejudgment that it cannot serve those basic needs. If we are to arrive at that conclusion, it ought to be emphatically by a pathway of persistent and honest pursuit of fact. No fairer or finer prospectus for any journey into our contemporary world could be formulated than that given by Zona Gale, in the sentence which she calls her social creed—"I am determined to increase the area of my awareness."

That doesn't sound much like a creed. That's the beauty of it. Too many creeds begin at the wrong end. They start out with a ringing "I believe." Such an affirmation ought to be the end of a process of thought rather than the beginning. A really vital creed is nothing but the conclusion of a process of enlarged awareness. It begins with experience. To begin with a creed, religious, scientific or economic, is merely to acquire a set of brittle dogmas which rattle around in the mind like marbles in a bag, with no growing roots to touch experience.

Toward such awareness of how the dominant forces in our society actually work, nothing could make a more real contribution than a revival of the Socratic art of asking questions. Alas that the suggestion has to be made in a year when asking a pertinent question about the standing order is, in many places in Europe and elsewhere, equivalent to asking for the death sentence, or at least for a ticket to a concentration camp! In the United States such questioning is rapidly becoming a form of high treason, in so far as the D. A. R., the American Legion, Chambers of Commerce, and multiplying vigilantes can make it such. Yet question asking is a fundamental Christian technique, a veritable redeeming agency. The first recorded act of Jesus was asking questions in the Temple. Facing a great inherited tradition, he both "listened and asked questions." When the Church has ceased to ask irritating, shattering questions concerning the world in which it was set, it always has been carried away into captivity.

The prophet Micah, from a painful awareness of his nation's condition, pictured a great assize—"God hath a controversy with his people." Date that 1936, or any year of this first half of the present century, and the prophet's picture fits. God has a controversy with his people and their institutions. The indictment of our present profit-driven society has long since become a twice-told tale vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man. Yet, it hasn't even begun to permeate the fringe of consciousness of the mass of church members. For that reason the development of the question-raising type of mind, in the high tradition of Jesus in the Temple, must be a first concern of a Church which aspires to serve the present age.

In order to hold clearly before the eye, even at the cost of being very elementary, a definition of what is being scrutinized from the Christian point of view may prove useful. By the present form of capitalism is meant "a system of society in which the main productive and distributive equipment is in the form of privately owned capital and which is operated primarily for the purpose of money-making rather than human use." For the sake of brevity, the Christian controversy with that system might be restated, very sketchily, under the classic form of the Seven Deadly Sins, which prevent the pronouncing of "We" in any saving manner.

1. *The first of these Deadly Sins is that as long as profit is the chief aim, the needs of humanity are not being met.* If that sounds like a cablegram from Moscow, let it be put in a sharp, clear form as it

originated not in Moscow, but in a spot, spiritually as well as physically, quite distant—Princeton, New Jersey. Professor Frank A. Fetter, of Princeton, thus analyzes this deadly economic sin: "We are living in a society which is financially controlled to intercept the gains of economic progress by means of higher prices to consumers and of financial rewards to insiders, thus keeping the fruits of science and technology from passing on to the people."[1] "To intercept the gains of economic progress"—from no soapbox or pulpit has the realism of that indictment been exceeded. It is this profit motivation which is so largely responsible for the confusion of the centuries mentioned in the previous chapter, "the tragic lag," as the sociologists call it, between social and economic theory and practice, and the technological advance of the means of production. It is the profit-seeking in ever new forms, combined with that technical advance, which is responsible for the curious self-defeating quality of present capitalism, even within its own theory. This has become so obvious that even lip service to *laissez-faire* and genuflexion to the great god Adam Smith, is no longer compulsory, even in the temples of Big Business. The venerated "free market," that charter of salvation for nineteenth-century industrialism, has disappeared into the historical museum, for, as Professor Fetter observes, "Monopolistic conditions, rather than free markets, prevail in most of the great standardized

[1] *Facing the Facts: An Economic Diagnosis.* Edited by J. G. Smith. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1934.

industries of America." Broad human needs are not being met by a system intent primarily on the grasping of private piles of profits. All the recent investigations of America's capacity to produce, however they may vary as to exact figures, agree strongly that our production plant could furnish a much higher standard of living if the gains were not "intercepted." That omnipresent sign of distress, nailed upon factory buildings, that sign of the Black Death of the twentieth century, "No Help Wanted," if looked at long and fixedly enough, really spells out a judgment which once appeared on another wall a long time ago, "Mene, Mene Tekel Upharsin"—"Weighed in the balance and found wanting."

2. *There is an inadequate purchasing power to maintain the machinery of production and keep it going.* The mass consumption necessary to the mass production has not been secured, as Raymond B. Fosdick says: "The problem of the machine age is not so much a problem of producing goods as it is of producing buyers. Our cotton is rolling up in our ports like gigantic snowdrifts, and the price has fallen to an abysmal depth. In copper, steel, motors, merchandising, and a dozen other industries, the story is the same—a drying-up of the stream of consumption. . . . The unemployed are waiting for the flow of wages so that they can buy the things they need. . . . We have maneuvered ourselves into a vast stalemate. . . ." That is a restrained description of the Waterloo of a profit-centered order. For the history of the past six years has made it com-

pletely evident that the one thing the owners of big business will not do is to grant the increase in wages which might save the system or at least give it a lease of life. In a crisis capitalism declares war on labor and fights with many means fair and foul, to suppress the working class, with an unbelievable blindness to the necessity of buying power, even to the preservation of its own profits. The nullification of section 7A of the N. R. A. and the persistent stabilizing of wages at a level too low to give any necessary buying power to move mountains of goods, has run true to form. The record of 1932, the abysmal "low" of the depression, when dividend payments and interest were kept at almost seventy per cent higher than they were in 1925, while factory payrolls diminished to less than fifty per cent of what they were at that time, is the perfect illustration of the economics of bedlam. The situation merits the judgment which Jesus pronounced on the rich fool in the parable, whose one idea was the mass production of barns, to hold a surplus of goods. He was a man who gave all his attention to production and none at all to consumption. Jesus pronounced the verdict "Thou fool!" The epithet applies equally well to an economic system which does the same thing. The breakdown has pronounced that verdict emphatically.

Of course this interpretation is denied. Nicholas Murray Butler in a comparatively recent complacent pronouncement said that most of the talk about maldistribution of wealth in the United States was "sheer invention." But by a lovely bit of irony the same

issue of the newspaper which carried his words of wisdom also carried the official estimate of the administration that five million families would be on relief the coming winter (1934-1935). The bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church have summed up the inescapable conclusion: "We now know that the kingdom of God cannot be built upon the poverty of the many and the absurd and cruel wealth of the few." More than that is true. Not even the structure of profit-seeking business can be kept erect on such a slanting foundation.

3. *The appalling waste involved in capitalist operation, as it has been carried on, is another count in a social and Christian indictment.* The violent and artificial creation of scarcity in an age of abundance, whether practiced by business itself or the government doing the same thing through the A. A. A. and other means, is only a more dramatic and glaring example of continual waste. The waste of goods is the smallest part of the crime, great as the total is —waste of food, plowed-under cotton, empty acres, fruit and vegetables rotting on the ground. In a nation with multitudes without an extra shirt for their back, the brightest idea profit-seeking can improvise is to cut off shirts at the source, on the cotton stalk.

Worse still is the waste of life and physical and moral deterioration a depression inevitably brings, including the spectacle of the long parade of young men and women educated by society to perform a useful social function and then denied the right to

exercise that function. We are appalled at the waste of war. John Oxenham's poem on the waste of war enumerates in catalogue form the various types of waste—the waste of muscle, waste of mind, of skill, of every human trait and capacity. There is hardly an item in all the long list of war waste which is not also a waste of the war that has no ending, that struggle, described by Fetter, "to intercept the gains" of economic progress. There is waste of muscle, waste of soul, waste of the security which life needs as its inner spring, waste of the potentialities of personality, waste of the true wealth of nations.

One of the best known of the poems of Ralph Hodgson is called "Stupidity Street." He gives that name to the street in which he found larks and other singing birds sold as meat in a butcher shop!

Stupidity Street is a long lane as it winds through our world. It has varying labels—Wall Street, Market Street, and that shaded parkway in the restricted residential section, Paradise Avenue. If we shrink from the waste of songbirds in a butcher shop, how about another kind of "songbird" in the boy and girl tramps wandering through the country in an odyssey of despair? Hungry men, the fathers of hungry children, dumping oranges into San Francisco Bay—that is not imagination, that is actual fact —at the foot of Stupidity Street! Hundreds of thousands of children left without schooling, while almost three million dollars a day are spent on the engines of war—that is daily routine on Stupidity Street!

Surely, it is time to rethink an old virtue. Thrift

has been a sort of god to economic individualism. We have made for ourselves a graven image, Thrift, and bowed down to it as a jealous God. Now we see the reverse side of a narrow thrift in an unmeasurable waste. The blind worship of saving, the investment in new capital goods, has worked a terrible revenge. Thrift must be lifted to a higher level, carried out into a broader area, that of a wise and powerful thrift of the total resources of a nation and its wealth of personality. To that end we can well listen to the words of Him who said, "Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost."

4. *The industrial anarchy, with its fateful rhythm, the old curse of Egypt, lean years following a boom, is another feature of our standing order.* "Boom" is a short word for "boomerang." There has been no demonstration that the recurring depressions of the last hundred years are not an inseparable element in the system. "Planning" is the magic word frequently invoked. Sir Arthur Salter, in his *Recovery, the Second Effort,* grows particularly frank in his admission that as at present performing the capitalist system is facing a collapse, and says in effect that there is no name given in heaven or on earth whereby we must be saved except planning. "The world is now at one of the great crossroads of history," he writes: "The system, usually termed capitalist, but I think better termed competitive, under which the Western world has made its astonishing progress of the last century and a half, has developed deep-seated defects which will threaten its existence unless they can be

cured. We need reform and in larger measure to transform this system. We need so to improve the framework of law, of institutions, of custom and public direction and control, that the otherwise free activities and competitive enterprises of man, instead of destroying each other, will inure to the general good. In the organization of industry, of credit and of money, we need to supplement the automatic processes of adjustment by deliberate planning."[2]

But another conservative economist, Professor Sumner H. Slichter,[3] of Harvard, has pointed out, with equal frankness and positiveness, what a frail hope there is in any planning done by a profit-driven capitalism. He believes there is scant hope to eliminate booms and depressions under capitalism. *Production cannot be guided by plans and prices at the same time.* Under planning, Socialism would be necessary, and that, in turn, means an abolition of the profit system. The italics are ours. The words deserve italics, for they probe to the focal infection of the disease. Capitalism as we know it can plan for two things—profits and war. And what technical genius it brings to both sorts of planning, genius and ruthlessness!

5. *A fifth deadly sin is the inciting of unchristian motives.* The momentum of production for profit comes from the very motives which Jesus condemned. The continual and forceful playing on the motive of

[2] Sir Arthur Salter, *Recovery, the Second Effort.* D. Appleton-Century Co., New York, 1931.

[3] Sumner H. Slichter, *Towards Security.* Henry Holt & Co., 1934.

acquisition results in property values being put above human values, and has built that warped scale of values into our whole legal structure. More than that, such a scale of values frustrates the aim of Christian evangelization and nurture. The Church will sometime learn that if it is really serious about the development of Christlike character, it must give its earnest efforts to the creation of an economic system which does not train its powerful efforts on the breakdown and deterioration of Christian character. That is what happens at the present time as most pastors, who faithfully shepherd individual lives, know. Training up boys and girls in the ideals of Jesus, and sending them out into the competitive scramble of our world, is like growing flowers in a hothouse and then setting them out in a subzero January and expecting them to thrive.

6. *The dominant powers of our present way of life set arbitrary bounds to the freedom of the individual and cynically deny essential human dignity to large sections of the population.* The high priests of finance might well retort (and frequently do) that such idealistic moonshine is irrelevant to "sound business." But it is eternally relevant to a genuine Christianity. What is the empty boon of political freedom worth to peon sharecroppers of the South, to the hordes now turned adrift from transient camps, when there is no freedom to work, freedom to live decently, or freedom for the mind to walk without the haunting frame of fear?

7. *Every passing day gives a heavy black underlin-*

*ing to the seventh deadly sin of selfish profit-seeking, that its practices and procedures make inevitably for war.* It is the inevitable and logical climax that rival imperialisms clash. Increasingly we watch the use of the power of the State to shore up the collapsing structure of capitalism, as in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and in various trends in America. Mussolini has given the perfect dramatic performance of showing the mechanisms of diverting workers from seeking any change in their own status or share in the social order by inducing the fever of nationalism. The revelations of the last few years have made it overwhelmingly clear that the United States was pushed into the Great War by the goad of profits. In no area of life is there a more urgent need of clear-eyed and honest thinking on the part of the Church. A large amount of earnest agitation for peace is futile because peace is conceived as though it were a beautiful entity all by itself in a vacuum. Only a pitiful minority within the Church has yet shown any glimmer of recognition of the elementary truth that the main causes of war are economic. Many church people loudly demand peace, and at the same time fight vigorously to preserve intact the practices which lead to war. The machine gun is the child of two parents—the power-driven machine and the adding machine.

## IV

If the alternative suggested above—Pronounce or Perish—is a real one, that is, if social control and a

real measure of social ownership are the alternatives to breakdown, what indications are there on the horizon that the owning groups might say "We"? The answer is clear and portentous. We see a stiffened and vigorous resistance to any co-operation, even for the salvation of their own system. We have had a complete demonstration of the prediction made three years ago by Harold Laski that a governing group that is well satisfied with a *status quo* where the very grain of the law is set in the direction of property interest, will use every means to avoid the surrender of the central fortress of private profit, although in prosperous days it might concede an outwork here and there to social reform.[4] That prediction is now history, and stern history which ought to wake social reformers and liberal idealists from the sleep into which many dropped, using for a pillow the illusion of sure automatic progress. This stubborn blindness to existing conditions is on a par with the enlightened attitude expressed in a recent vote in the House of Commons. The subject under discussion was the Waterloo Bridge, whether it ought not to be taken down as unsafe. Engineers had submitted reports showing that it was becoming an unsafe structure, unfitted to stand the strains put upon it. After which the House solemnly voted that it would stand! What is a little thing like gravitation compared to a vote of the House of Commons? And what is a little thing like a stalled eco-

[4] Harold Laski, *Democracy in Crisis*. University of North Carolina Press. 1933.

nomic machine compared to a loud, emotional affirmation that "Happy Days Are Here Again"?

Confronted with the choice of co-operating in social experiment or fighting, the unanimous choice has been fighting. A new list of battlefields in that long war is replacing the legends of Gettysburg and Shiloh, names such as Weirton; Harlan County, Kentucky; and Toledo.

No mood of repentance is to be discerned. True, in the dark days of near collapse of the banking system in March, 1933, the air was full of shrieks from business "What must we do to be saved?" But that particular slice of history is now regarded as a fit of temporary insanity and expelled from memory.

Even the slightest rumor of recovery is greeted with the old song of the ticker—so effectively vocalized by Ogden Nash,

> "London Bridge is falling down,
> But stocks are going up;
> Hunger shuffles through the town,
> But stocks are going up.
> Tell the farmer in the dell,
> Tell the striker in the cell
> Zero hour and all is well—
> Stocks are going up."[5]

The privileged groups, instead of any measure of reform, have taken refuge in incantation. Arguments have ceased to be language and have become a sort of chant. The chant is raised to an image

[5] Ogden Nash, *Happy Days.* Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York. 1934.

called Freedom, invariably identified with the perpetuation of present privileges. Paraphrasing Wordsworth, we might well say today, "Madam Roland, thou shouldst be living at this hour." She would see more crimes committed in the name of Liberty than she ever dreamed of. The hysterical devotion to Freedom on the part of the beneficiaries of special privilege would strike the sense of humor even of a person on his way to the guillotine. Did we hear much protest against "government in business" in the days when the machinery of government was used to give fat subsidies to big business through the tariff and R. F. C. loans? Does the previous question of "Freedom for whom?" or "Freedom for what?" ever appear in the manifestoes of the Liberty League? Is it freedom for the jobless with one sixth of the population receiving public relief? Freedom to starve? Freedom to work at a socially insignificant task for an insufficient wage? Is it freedom for the one hundred and thirty-five thousand New York City's school children, in the fall of 1935, when one fifth of the city's citizens for the future were so weak from malnutrition that they could not profit by attendance at regular classes in the elementary schools?

The chorus to freedom sounds all too like the noise from the animal cages at the zoo at dinner time. The howls are pitched in various keys, but they are all barking one anthem, "Sweet Land of Liberty." They are unanimously asserting the inalienable right to prowl and prey.

Such empty incantations are a sorry fulfillment of the oft-repeated protestations of the high powers of business that they would engineer "recovery."

## V

Paradoxical as it may seem, the first step in any genuine advance for the Church in a time of crisis has always been, in the phrase of E. W. Lyman, to "recover great memories." To make great memories available as present resources is the initial concern of organized Christianity today. No historic memory is more needed as an inner fortification than the recovered mood of the first Christian century when the heralds of the gospel went out into a disintegrating society convinced that it was under the condemnation of God. They had a faith that they were preaching to a doomed age. The men who carried the Christian message of salvation to the Roman world did not conceive of themselves as a few idealists acting under the impulse of a fantastic whim. They did not picture themselves as romantic crusaders against hopeless odds. They were carrying the word of God to an evil age, an evil world, an evil order of life, which was under the judgment of God. The throb of that central assurance is felt on every page of the New Testament from Acts to Revelation. That same assurance is indispensable to any thoroughgoing Christian ministry to our time and civilization. To say this is not at all to plead for an obscurantist revival of the apocalyptic form of that first-century sense of an impending end of an age,

but to affirm the need for an apostolic confidence of the divine disapproval of an immoral order of life. There is need for a sense of God working through contemporary historical processes; a sense of our living in a moral universe; an unmovable faith that at the heart of the universe there is no heaviest-battalion God, but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; that an economic and political way of life out of plumb with the will of that God is doomed.

That necessary conviction of the cosmic roots of Christian morality has been vividly compressed into a luminous sentence within the last three years by George Bernard Shaw in words which he puts into the mouth of Jesus, in an imaginary dialogue between Pilate and Jesus. It occurs in the preface to his play *On the Rocks*. At the culmination of the conversation Jesus says: "The kingdom of God is striving to come. The empire that looks backward in terror shall give way to the kingdom that looks forward with hope."

That, undeniably, was the faith of Jesus. That, undeniably, is the only faith that overcometh the world, the faith that the empire that looks backward with fear is doomed to give way to the kingdom that looks forward with hope.

That faith, in such a dislocated world as ours, is not a mere delusive wish. The lines of a new Christian apologetic are being shaped by a world whose economic collapse is due to moral causes. To be saved economically we must believe in the reading of

life which Jesus gave. We are being lost, economically damned, through unbelief.

Arnold Bennett has given us a painfully vivid description of paralysis as "a tragedy in ten thousand acts." The economic paralysis, which we euphemistically call "the depression," is a tragedy in ten million acts. The economic breakdown is a commentary on, an overwhelming demonstration of, Jesus' teaching that men rise and fall together, they are "tied in a living tether," and that the only adequate foundation of common health, of salvation, is devotion to the common welfare. We are daily being taught the lessons that an order of life reared on the basis of unrestrained self-seeking is a house built on sand. They are lessons so painfully clear, with hunger and bankruptcy in the teacher's chair, that one would think that a wayfaring man, even though a captain of industry, should not escape their meaning.

Go through the list of generally accepted causes of the depression—that list which we run through our minds like a mournful rosary—and see if the items are not, in the last analysis, institutionalized skepticisms concerning Jesus' fundamental law of love and human service. Speculation, the taint in the blood which feverishly seeks something for nothing; overproduction, from the insistent demand for immediate profits; the great financial prizes given most largely to exploiters of other men's labor; the lack of social responsibility which piles up reserves for dividends, but no reserves for flesh and blood, for

heart and soul; a disproportionate distribution of wealth which leaves no buying power to move the mountains of goods—these are the fruits of our unbelief. We do not believe and we have as our reward, blight and ruin.

In W. S. Gilbert's *Iolanthe,* the Lord Chancellor refuses to take a lover's protestation that all nature is in sympathy with his case. The Chancellor says, "Now, an affidavit from a thunderstorm, or a few words on oath from a heavy shower will meet with all the attention they deserve." In terribly sober truth, that is exactly what a world-wide economic breakdown has been—"an affidavit from a thunderstorm," words on oath from a very heavy shower of ruin, to the fact that only an economic house which rests on the foundation of an abundant life for all men, which rests on an acknowledged brotherhood, is founded on an unshakable rock.

Another field in which the penalty of economic damnation for moral disobedience can be clearly traced is that of international relations. A world depression following a World War is an inescapable preaching of the truth that God has made of one blood all men to dwell together. And "he that believeth not shall be damned." In the history of Christian apologetics the little mechanism known as Paley's watch played quite a prominent rôle for a long time. In his *View of the Evidences of Christianity,* which for three quarters of a century from 1800 on, was used as an arsenal of proofs of the truth of the Christian religion, William Paley argued

that finding a watch on a seashore would prove an intelligent creator of the watch. So by analogy, he reasoned, the Creator of the world could be proved by the creation. Paley's watch has stopped ticking today, as far as proofs of Christianity are concerned. But there are other mechanisms today, far more intricate as well as more massive, symbols of our highly technical network of society, which do have terribly impressive evidential value, in relation to the truths which Jesus proclaimed. Increasingly they proclaim that men are living in an intermeshed world which can only go on successfully under the direction of social principles instead of individual selfishness. Such machines are the Bessemer converter in the steel industry, the giant automatic machines of automobile-body-building factories, the power looms with a thousand spindles, and the airplane, that fateful reminder that we are living in an eight-day world, as the globe-circling trip of the late Wiley Post demonstrated. These twentieth-century mechanisms, combining nervous delicacy with enormous power, affecting the destiny of millions of men, women, and children, cannot be safely operated, often cannot even run at all, without a recognition of the interdependence of men, of the basic reality of brotherhood in human life. They are vital contemporary evidences that the ethical teaching of Jesus is everlastingly right, and the only adequate foundation for the towers of our modern world-structure.

With such a demonstrated need for a world to learn mutuality, to learn to say "We" in all the

varied speech of industrial, agricultural and political mechanisms, a Church which fails to fling itself sacrificially into that need, will in the future have only the insignificant rôle of trying to explain why it failed. Perhaps the most inglorious figure in American history is that of James Buchanan, who preceded Abraham Lincoln in the Presidency of the United States. He spent the last years of his life explaining why he did nothing in the life-and-death crisis which faced the country in 1859 and the first months of 1860. That pathetic figure of the old man, trying, like an Ancient Mariner, to get the attention of chance passers-by to explain and justify his inaction, is a sobering one for the Church to hold before its imagination. There will be no future for an "explaining Church."

## Chapter III

# A VERTICAL GOSPEL IN A HORIZONTAL WORLD

THE word "horizontal" is used in the chapter heading above in two senses. Our world may be called horizontal in that it is so largely prone, knocked flat, not erect with a confident stride, but stretched out, vitally wounded. It might also be truly called horizontal in that it takes so largely its goals, its motives, its sanctions and reliances from the horizontal level of a secular civilization. It reaches out but not up. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills" is not the current affirmation of politics, of diplomacy, of business. Indeed, it is a natural accompaniment of this level outlook, undisturbed by any Mount Zions, that we should have in some quarters a very horizontal religion, which looks up to no God. A humanism six feet high expresses its highest worship in an adoring look into the face of man.

Against this horizontal conception of the world there stands the vertical interpretation of the universe. It is an old outlook—"I saw the Lord, high and lifted up." Above the highest towers thrown up by man its eyes are raised. At a right angle, to the far spread of earth, it sees a habitation not made with hands, an Eternal who has been man's dwelling

place in all generations. That vertical vision of life has built temples with aspiring lines running up toward the sky. In no terms can the central problems of history and of contemporary history in the making be more profoundly conceived than in the contrast and conflict of the horizontal and vertical interpretations of the world.

Of course there has been, and still is, what might be called a "vertical religion," which has been a veritable blight on human life and welfare. Such a religion has been predominantly other-worldly, world-renouncing, world-escaping, with eyes averted from the world. Such religion has failed to perform the saving function of salt in society.

Such religion is a caricature of the ethical theism which lies at the heart of Christianity. Christianity may be called a vertical religion, in that it has a high and holy mountain in its cosmos as well as the level plain of human effort. It sees life grounded on the ultimate reality of a God of love. It sees life set against absolute standards which have their source in the nature of that God. It finds a cosmic support for human hope in the reality of that God. It believes that the things for which Jesus lived and died are the very axis of the universe. Such a faith brings to the human struggle for a fairer future and a better world, the resources of the conviction that the struggle is not a fantastic quixotic whim, but has behind it the final powers of the universe. Such a vertical gospel supplies both the ground of hope and the goal of effort.

## A Vertical Gospel in a Horizontal World

The first and ultimate need for social redemption is not a handful of economic programs but a faith, a faith which finds its momentum of effort as well as the end to be achieved in the nature of God as revealed in Christ.

### I

If organized Christianity is to perform effectively the service of sharing that gospel, it must first of all get a fuller apprehension of its cosmic nature and significance. There is no paradox of Christian history more important than that the first demand of a great social opportunity and responsibility is not a demand for action but for thought. We have had so much emphasis on Christianity as a way of life, sometimes in stereotyped rubber-stamp phrases, that we are liable to forget that Christianity is not only a way of life but a way of thought. It is not only a code of conduct but a philosophy of life, and the only valid philosophy. This is particularly pertinent today because, due partly to political controversy, there is no word which is pronounced with a sharper scorn than the word "theorist." It might almost be said that if one person wants to call another a really bad name, he calls him a "theorist." The Liberty League, for instance, has declared war on "all theorists and experimentalists." Yet when we look at those two words carefully, we realize that they describe with remarkable accuracy and fullness just what a Christian is. When he ceases to be a theorist or an experimentalist he ceases to be a Christian.

Christianity is a theory and a practice which issues from a theory. Otherwise it is merely a beautiful picture hanging in the clouds with no visible means of support, like the sky castles in a Maxfield Parrish picture.

It was so historically. Paul went into the Roman world with a theory. It was a theory so preposterous that it was to the Greeks foolishness and to the Jews a stumbling block. He was a theorist, zealously guarding the sharp outlines of his theory from the blur of eclectic fog, ferociously fighting to keep its tough intellectual quality from evaporating into an emotional rhapsody. He held that theory so rigidly and talked it so incessantly that one of his recent biographers (if a creator of romantic fiction can be called a biographer), Professor F. A. Spencer, in *Beyond Damascus,* calls him a "monomaniac." Into that theory he packed a metaphysic, a psychology, a philosophy of history, the theory that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. One great reason that Christianity emerged a victor from its struggle with other religions in the first two centuries was that while it was a cult of salvation, similar in form to many others, it was also a world view, a theology.

It is important to get a new seizure of the centrality of theory, of cosmic philosophy in Christianity, for so many currents of our day make against it. The disparagement of theory has carried over from other fields. In addition to that is the real weight of the long-continued traditional American distrust of the

thinker. Unless Christianity is a theory of reality, it soon degenerates into a series of pragmatic alarms and excursions. That has been and is today one great danger and liability of the Christian religion as a factor in social change. Without theory religion speaks a language which is all adjectives without nouns, and that always results in an incoherent babble. If we limply accept the high-sounding contrast between theology and religion and drain off the nouns from our religion and leave only its beautiful adjectives, we have a wraith suspended in midair, a sort of kindly smile, like the disembodied grin of the Cheshire cat.

The Italian playwright, Pirandello, wrote a play entitled *Six Characters in Search of an Author.* Much of the speech of a loquacious Christianity made up largely of good purposes and wishes might well be called "six adjectives in search of a noun." The noun is the sinew of speech and religion. Paul used adjectives—honest, pure, lovely, of good report —but his adjectives were attached to cosmic nouns, God and Christ.

The blindness which results from a failure to recognize that the gift of Christianity to the world is first of all an apprehension and declaration of ultimate reality is illustrated in the jaunty complacency of a recent plea of Roger W. Babson to the ministers of his Church. He dogmatically commands: "Declare a moratorium on theological preaching. To continue to mention those old doctrines while neglecting to preach on the great power of love, faith,

prayer, and service, is a crime. Turn over a new leaf and omit the questionables. Help your people solve today's problems." It is hard to conceive how more fatuous nonsense could be packed into so few words. Preach love, he cries, but omit all theology, that is, all reference to the cosmic ground of love. A religion which starts to help people solve today's problems by pitching over the absolutes of faith will never be more than futile chatter.

The eternal relation of a God-centered religion to social progress finds a classic expression in the word of Isaiah, "O Zion, that bringeth good tidings, get ye up into the high mountain." It is from the high mountains of a clear view of a moral God that any permanent and sufficient good news must be brought. Amos had the same vertical conception: "Let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." An effective righteousness derives its momentum from gravitation downward from the height of God.

The most hopeful thing on the whole social horizon today is the undoubted fact that we are in the midst of a strong movement in Christian thought toward the recovery of a God-centered faith. God is moving in Christian thinking, moving from the suburbs to the center, from the fringe into the core. There has never been a time in recent history when it was less of a social blunder to speak of God in the pulpit. To say this is not to assert that there was little preaching about God during the past fifty years. God has been a continuous sermon theme. But the

real hot spot of emphasis, of expectation, of reliance, has not been on what God may do and will do, but on what man is doing and can do. Man was cast for the central rôle in the drama; God was useful as background. The hymn beginning, "Work, for the night is coming," represented a far more dominant mood than "O God, our help in ages past." For at least sixty years most religious thought has been more horizontal than vertical. It has pivoted about man, and often unconsciously the limitations of man have been carried over into the idea of God. The whole religious structure had a good many resemblances to a Tower of Babel; it was erected by man, a human achievement rather than a divine gift.

Take the very phrases which became stock *clichés* in religious discussion, one of which, for example, was "building the kingdom of God." How sharp the contrast that phrase has to the words of Jesus: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." To Jesus, the Kingdom was a bestowal; a gift of God. To us, it has been largely conceived as a human achievement. It has been pertinently observed that our verbs are in the active voice, while in the New Testament religion begins in the passive voice. The men of the early Church were men of action; the history of the creative days is called "The Acts of the Apostles." But they put their religious experience into the passive voice. Their chief words were not ours, "moving forward," "progressing," "achieving." They were quite different words, verbs picturing themselves as

acted upon by God, "saved," "renewed," "transformed," "changed." A first item on any adequate program of social action is the recovery of the passive voice in religion.

Consider two illustrations of a man-centered faith in the past generation. One is the great widespreading group of financial campaigns in the Church in the postwar years, for increased budgets for denominational activity, using the mass psychology developed by the war. Some day that history will be written, and it will make a story worth pondering and calling for self-searching. It is a strangely compacted mixture of a high adventure of faith, a seizure of opportunity and also a reliance on the weight of high-pressure propaganda and the strong-arm methods of "putting over" other campaigns. It had real elements of building a Tower of Babel, followed by the sequel of a good deal of confusion of tongues. The other illustration of an anthropocentric quality of determining conceptions of religion is in the field of religious education. Here again, with such a varied and fruitful a movement covering more than a generation, painting cannot be done in sharp black and white. But among the blended colors was an emphasis on continuous progress, which played into the hand of an immoral and irreligious optimism, which so deeply marked the generation.

The present trend toward a more theocentric gospel reflects the plea of Phillips Brooks, "Attach yourself to the center of your ministry, not to some point on its circumference." It is in line with the insight

of Paul Elmer More to the effect that the great word of the Christian faith is not love but hope. If the Christian community is to play at all the desperately needed rôle of the bringer of hope to a hopeless world, it must have more than a jaunty slap on the back and an empty injunction to "cheer up." We have had quite enough of that to demonstrate completely its bitter impertinence. Hope worthy of that name must spring from the ultimate truth about the nature of the world we live in, from God. It must bring from that final reality resources for and compulsions to social change necessary to the realization of the potentialities of life.

## II

This trend in current theological thought—the shift in the center of gravity from man to God—like every great gift, has real dangers connected with it. The present needed emphasis on God brings three liabilities, in particular. The effect of each of these liabilities is plainly evident in different quarters.

The first danger is that of substitution, the liability that theological interest and absorption may constitute themselves an alternative to action inspired by religious propulsion. Theological speculation may become a whiff of holy chloroform, deadening the motor nerves, instead of being an incentive to righteousness, especially for the difficult and baffling business of opening the way for social righteousness to roll down as a mighty stream. It is an ironical aspect of Christian history that often a preoccupa-

tion with God has become the great adjournment of the work of God in the world.

A second danger is that of using the idea of God, and faith in God, in a merely instrumental sense, as a means of getting some extraneous purpose accomplished. God is liable to become a sort of cosmic lever handy for man's purposes. Such instrumental use of the idea of God is always a prostitution. The experience of God is an end in itself, inherently worthful in itself, to a degree that transcends the worth of all other experiences. God is not to be made merely a convenient means, even to the accomplishment of high moral ends. We see such viciously instrumental use of God in many realms. One sample is the counsel of W. Beran Wolfe, the psychiatrist, in his book, *A Woman's Best Years.* Urging women to keep the zest of life after middle age, he gives some hints concerning how to do it. "Wear a red hat," he urges, "or a gardenia corsage, or take an interest in the League of Nations, or develop a new consciousness of God."[1] That is the instrumental use of God with a vengeance! God, bracketed with a bouquet of gardenias, as a means of propping up one's self-confidence! The widely sold book of Mary Pickford, with the revealing title, *Why Not Try God?* illustrates the same tendency. "God," she explains, "is a twenty-four-hour station. All you need to do is to plug in. You plug in with your thinking. Truthful thinking. Good thinking, kind thinking,

[1] W. Beran Wolfe, *A Woman's Best Years.* Emerson, 1934.

unselfish thinking, and you can have and use all the love, all the power, all the courage, all the energy, all the cheerfulness, all the activity, all the kindliness of God."[2]

The idea of God can be as misused, however, even when the ends are far greater than that of individual happiness. Religion is prostituted when it ceases to be an end and becomes a means of supplying energy for the accomplishment of some other end, no matter how good that end may be. Religion, of course, is a measureless source of energy. But it is totally misconceived and degraded, when it is valued and used primarily as a potential supply of energy for the doing of some task.

A third danger of the present trend to a God-centered theology is that it may so emphasize the transcendence of God that it effectively removes him from human life by lifting him so high above the human struggle for righteousness, justice, and peace, that he does not touch it. That is the moral liability of Barth. For many, Barthianism relegates God to the stratosphere, "up above the world so high," so completely other and transcendent that in relation to the redemption of society he does not exist. It is strange paradox that the extreme exaltation of God may have the same practical effect as atheism. A whimsical indication of that tendency is preserved in a question asked over a hundred years ago by the shrewd and witty Mary Moody Emerson, of Concord,

[2] Mary Pickford, *Why Not Try God?* H. C. Kinsey & Co., 1934.

Massachusetts. Interrupting a philosophical flight of Bronson Alcott, she asked him, in highly obstruse terms, "Do you mean, Mr. Alcott, that omnipotence abnegates attributes?" That is exactly what extreme Barthianism tends toward—the abnegation of attributes. It needs the emphatic reminder that the God of Christian worship is also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. A special and important part of this liability of the Barthian emphasis on God is that it serves to put people up on a grandstand, in the rôle of spectators of God's action. There is only one grandstand in the New Testament—"Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." In the New Testament the place for everyone else is down in the arena, struggling "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world."

Yet the Church and the world are under an immense debt to Barth for his great contribution to the recovery of a God-centered message. He has given an effective challenge to a religion all too preoccupied with man and his world. He has helped Christians to take on their lips old words, "In the beginning God." His stress on the sovereignty of God and the holiness of God, a God who is a prime condition of life, is a real recovery of the much-discussed "lost radiance of the Christian religion."

## III

Too much stress cannot be laid on the resources which faith in God makes available for the bringing

about of social change for the sake of human welfare. Historically, religion has been a tremendous instigator of discontent and revolt, a source of vision of a higher type of ethical life, an encourager of men to strike at a powerfully entrenched economic and social hierarchy. Both the Hebrew and the Christian traditions embody vivid illustrations of this influence. In each case it was a genuine ethical theism in which the vision of a just God fixed the goal and motive of social life to prophetic minds. From the days when an Amos and a Micah were nerved by faith in a righteous God to fling themselves against the entrenched evils of their time, down through Isaiah and Jeremiah, to Jesus going to a cross, an ethical religion has been a chief source of both social vision and social effort. This is not accidental; it has been one of the essential and permanent effects of religion. Consequently, no appraisal of the resources available for bringing about social change can be either full or realistic without the inclusion of religion.

It must be, however, a prophetic type of religion. The religion which is predominantly of the priestly type, or which is merely a holy baptism given to current codes of action which represent the *mores* of a ruling and privileged class, will not do. It must present a God of ethical character and not a God who is a mere rationalization of tribal ambition and class privilege. Perhaps in no shorter space could there be given a clearer idea of the effect which a passionate faith in a righteous God has had on sensi-

tive souls than that expressed in the old hymn of Ebenezer Elliott, which came out of the Chartist movement:

"When wilt thou save the people, Lord?
O God of mercy, when?
Not kings and lords, but nations,
Not thrones and crowns, but men!

"Flowers of thy heart, O God, are they;
Let them not pass like weeds away,
Their heritage a sunless day;
God save the people!"

Religious faith gives lasting momentum to social effort. That statement is not theory but a fact which can be adduced from thousands of contemporary lives as well as from history. It has given momentum to social effort; it does do so at the present time. William James, the psychologist, has recorded his observation of this fact in the following words:

> Our attitude toward concrete evils is entirely different in a world where we believe there are none but finite demanders, from what it is in one where we joyously face tragedy for an infinite demander's sake. Every sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity for handling life's evils, is set free in those who have religious faith. For this reason the strenuous type of character will on the battlefield of human history always outwear the easygoing type, and religion will drive irreligion to the wall.[3]

Such a faith is a dynamo. It is such a faith that

[3] William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience.* Longmans, Green & Co., New York, 1917.

is expressed in Luther's hymn beginning, "A mighty fortress is our God," one line of which pictures the supporting power of a belief in a God concerned with the persistence and triumph of human values: "And he shall win the battle."

Faith in divine resources, faith in divine purposes of love brings to men the feeling that the fight is worth making, that there is a chance to win. Without that backing the struggle to overcome the pull of the cynical question, "What's the use?" is ever so much harder. Such a faith contributes what is so desperately needed—the conviction that we can have a better world if we want it.

In the second place, it would be a man very deficient in any observation of life or familiarity with history who left no place in his thinking for the service which religion has had in increasing human sympathy, in quickening the imagination, and thereby enabling people to put themselves in the place of others. Let it be granted that not every type of religion has this feeling. A dogmatic, static type of religion has made men far more the fiends of hell than they were before having their native cruelty augmented by religious fanaticism. But religion which follows the spirit of Jesus, religion to which men are the supremely sacred things in the world, has enabled people to feel the cruel burdens which rested on others as though they rested on themselves. It is an extensive and noble part of the history of Christianity, as that history is written in the lives of people rather than in the fortunes of

institutions. It is no mere sentimentalism but sober history which sees an increase in the alert sympathies of many people as an influence which comes from their knowledge of One who was a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. That great stream of understanding sympathy, that willingness to take the part of the underprivileged which is so high a glory of the Jews is a heritage of the vision and sympathy of a religious tradition followed by the great prophets of the eighth century before Christ.

Worth mentioning too, as a contribution of religion to social radicalism, is the strange capacity of religion to give birth to what might be called "ugly ducklings." Repeatedly, throughout history, and today as well, organized religion has brought forth strange creatures who denied their traditions and hereditary conventions. The poor hen in the story of the Ugly Duckling was horrified by the ways and looks of the strange child she had raised. It was a perfectly scandalous and ungainly creature according to all hen traditions. That story has been repeated through all Christianity. In other words, amid the brood of priests again and again prophets have been born. Like Amos of Tekoa they have thundered the word of God. Such "ugly ducklings," unexpected by all rules of probability, have been born to the Church—Savonarola, Luther, George Fox, Roger Williams. This prophetic order of "Ugly Ducklings" who will not fit into any pigeonhole and who will not be bound by any strait jacket is still being continued.

Finally, religion does a permanent and indispensable service in keeping in the minds of men standards by which the contemporary world is judged. Let it be freely admitted to the world that the Church's standards are frequently quite different from those of her own Scriptures, from those of her own highest revelations. Nevertheless, persisting through the organization and inherent in ethical religion is the standard by which the brutalities of our present order are brought to judgment. It is indeed a part of this process that religion itself furnishes the standards by which its own organization, the Church, is judged.

To this fragmentary appraisal of the contribution of theistic faith to social salvation add two concrete pictures. The first is from England. In 1934 there was held in the remote Dorset village of Tolpuddle a centenary celebration of far more significance than the size of the crowd participating would suggest. It has significance, let us hope, for the future, as well as for the past. The occasion was the one hundredth anniversary of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. It was a tribute paid by the Methodist Church of Great Britain to six heroic men, five of whom were Methodists, and two, George Loveless, the leader, and his brother James, were local preachers. These men were martyrs who suffered for the trade-union principle of collective bargaining. All the six were farm laborers, men of "gentle innocence," to use the words of Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Ground down by the cruel exactions of taskmasters in the barbarous

years of the 1830's, deceived by lying promises, they organized with others a trade union to preserve their families, as they said "from utter degradation and starvation." For this daring they suffered illegal transportation to Australia under the most cruel conditions. In the resolution of the Methodist Conference of Great Britain, honoring them, there are noteworthy words:

"The Conference regards with sympathetic interest the forthcoming celebrations of the centenary of 'The Tolpuddle Martyrs,' whose witness for industrial liberty constitutes so stirring and significant an episode in our national history. It recalls with thankfulness that the leaders of the movement were Methodist local preachers who derived their convictions from their evangelical faith. The Conference prays that the commemoration of their Christian fidelity to freedom and humanity may kindle fresh devotion to the establishment of the kingdom of God in our industrial and social life."

Note the words, "derived their convictions from their evangelical faith." Here was a vertical religion in sacrificial action for a more abundant life for man. It is an inspiring thing to see a Church holding a grateful centennial celebration, not of a saint, or a preacher, or a missionary, but of trade-union members who gave their lives a ransom for many. In the century to come there will be more recognition, let us hope, of trade-union activity as definitely religious service.

The other concrete picture is from the United

States, Gilbert H. Barnes's stirring book, *The Anti-slavery Impulse, 1830-1844*. Professor Barnes tells the story of an anti-slavery impulse which began in religion and ended in Congress, ending with the abolition of slavery. It shows with far more clearness and detail than has ever been done before, that the initial momentum of the anti-slavery movement was neither economic nor political but religious. It was vertical rather than horizontal. Professor Barnes shows that many of the leading anti-slavery advocates started as revival preachers, and were propelled into a conflict with an entrenched economic evil by their religion.[4] God, to them, was not something they used as a ready tool for their purpose, but Someone by whom they were possessed.

Such instances have increased timeliness and importance today when many seem to be facing a false dilemma—the necessity of making a choice between religion as a refuge or economic change as a battle slogan. There is a great weight of history to show that there is still another possible choice, religion not as a refuge, but as an incentive and compulsion to economic change, not for the sake of a theory, or of a class, but for the sake of realizing God's purpose for men.

Surely, no apology need be offered today for insistence on the necessity of a faith grounded in the nature of reality, for lasting thrust and power in a great enterprise. One of the most impressive things

[4] Gilbert H. Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse*. D. Appleton-Century Co., New York, 1934.

in the twentieth century is Lenin's faith. His conviction of the inevitability of revolution and the coming to power of the proletariat was an essentially religious faith. It was founded, in his mind, on the kind of a world we live in, a world in which by the very operation of economic and political laws, laws as sure and relentless as those of physics, a regime such as czarist Russia could not last. He believed that the stars in their courses were fighting for Communism.

Without a faith, in which the transformation of an evil social order is necessitated by the very nature of God, those looking for it and working for it are liable to become the religious counterpart of "tired radicals," of which the churches are well stocked with specimens. Interest in social reform meets all varieties of experiences, well calculated to slow it down, disappointment in people, and the strange resistant inertia of mankind. Unless it is made of sterner stuff than youthful fervor and optimism, it is doomed to become a spent force. A certain denominational home for old people, on broadening its field to include several churches, needed to find a more inclusive name than its former denominational label. The new name chosen was, "Home for Worn-out Christians." That home ought to have a large waiting list, for there are multitudes of "worn-out Christians"! They have become worn out in ardor and strength for many reasons, but among the chief reasons is a lack of faith that an order of justice and love is the will of a God who cannot be defeated.

## IV

There is not only a need for social hope which roots in ultimate reality, but also increasing evidence that such a message meets a deeply felt mood of large numbers of people in the world today. A word of hope, coming from other sources than those of the processes of our own civilization, is a word in season to multitudes, for the confidence of man in his own powers has suffered an impressive exhaustion and deflation. The World War and its painful aftermath have pricked the balloon of optimistic confidence in a civilization which vaunted itself in being able to supply all the values, spiritual as well as material, which men need. Other ages, less intelligent and sophisticated, sought their highest values in realms outside their own creations. But the generation before the Great War labored under the glamorous delusion that all necessary goods and values were being automatically supplied by "progress." That rising inflated balloon of the inevitability of progress was impaled on the point of a bayonet twenty years ago. The resulting movement of thought on the part of a great many people may be somewhat closely suggested by two lines of a hymn:

> "When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
> Help of the helpless, O abide with me."

Professor C. C. J. Webb thus describes the change of mood: "The war produced a revival of interest in the quest of a revelation from without of values men despaired of discovering within a process of

civilization which had issued in so tremendous a catastrophe."[5]

Immersed as we have been in the deflationary process, it is difficult for our imagination to recall the burgeoning confidence of the optimisms which preceded 1914. That pride which went before a fall is but one more chapter in the tragic history of civilization which could be written in terms of fresh curses on mankind coming from each new optimism which dazzled the minds of men. The old optimism of Rome about the solution of the problem of urban population by bread and circuses would find a place in such a history. Bentham's optimism over the "natural" sequence of prosperity and independence following industry and thrift, brought in its wake the human devastation of the progressive mechanization of industry. Late nineteenth-century optimisms ushered in a curse of new depth and range.

The very beginnings of modern industry in England were carried on in the atmosphere of a false religion. Worship of machinery was a far more devout passion than worship of God. *Deus ex machina* received the genuflexions. Men were drunk with the sight of a heaven coming down out of scientific knowledge harnessed to machinery. T. H. Huxley himself intones in sonorous prose again and again the more stately forms of that creed.

The general buoyancy which ran out into nearly all fields of life is well described in an engaging bit

[5] *Religious Thought in England From 1850.* Oxford University Press, 1933.

of autobiography by Dr. John Haynes Holmes, recalling his mood, and that of millions of others, at the turn of the century:

> How simple and attractive was that world of 1904, into which with unbounded confidence I moved to establish my home and to serve the altars of my faith! That confidence, of course, was a confidence in myself, for such is the way of youth. But it was a confidence, also, in far greater things, in
>
> "The world which was ere I was born,
> The world which lasts when I am dead."
>
> Confidence in my inheritance, deep-rooted in the traditions of my New-England forbears! Confidence in my training, which had been conducted by the best scholars in the first university in the land! Confidence in my Church, which had reconciled religion with reason, and thus preserved the sanctity of truth! Confidence in my country, which had established in democracy the true order of society! Confidence in my class, the great multitude of the middle class, which was the saving substance of any people! Confidence in our civilization, which had found in the discoveries of science, the advancement of learning, the production of wealth, and manifold institutions of justice and liberty, the fulfillment of man's promise upon this earth! How happy it was to step out into that world which tempted ambition, rewarded virtue, and promised security! How easy it was to live in that world!
>
> I can best sum up this attitude of confidence by saying that, thirty years ago, we all believed in the law of progress, even as we did in the law of gravitation.[6]

In those days we all read our Scriptures with a

[6] *The Christian Register,* July 19, 1934.

lyrical inflection, "Beloved, now are we the sons of Darwin, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Humanity was on an escalator going up. And as the years of the great climax of 1914 approached like Fate in a Greek tragedy, there were some with the clear terrified eyes of Cassandra, concisely pictured by E. A. Robinson; written in 1905.

" 'Are you to pay for what you have
With all you are'—no other word
We caught, but with a laughing crowd
Moved on. None heeded, and few heard."[7]

But such voices were few. Two classic expressions, both published in London in the spring of 1914, convey some feeling of the tingle of the optimism. The first is from The London *Atheneum:* "Few observant people will deny that there are signs of an awakening in Europe. The Times [notice the capitalization—a subtle form of deification] are great with some new thing; a spiritual renaissance may be at hand." That spiritual renaissance burst in all its glory three months later in the booming of the guns at Liege!

The *Contemporary Review,* that same spring, chanted a sort of *Nunc Dimittis:* "We are face to face with a world teeming with the wonders of the unknown. A European renaissance [again that same will of the wisp—"renaissance"] is at hand, a thing of wonder and beauty. A supreme achievement."

Those quotations are not from fiction written by

[7] Edwin A. Robinson, *The Children of the Night.* Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

schoolgirls; they are the sober words of scholarly thinkers. They show the trance into which an immoral optimism carried men. Another scholar, J. B. Bury, looking downward from the ascending escalator in 1913, thus saluted the "victory" of liberty: "The struggle of reason against authority has ended in what appears now to be a decisive and permanent victory for liberty."[8] Impressive reading that, in these days twenty-three years later, with nine dictatorships in Europe and seditions acts in Great Britain and some states in America which would have seemed extreme in the days of Louis XIV. It is only natural that one of the most romantic prophecies of all should be found in the writings of H. G. Wells. He visited the United States in 1906, just thirty years ago, and the book resulting from the trip was entitled *The Future in America.* As his ship steamed out of the Narrows he cast an eye back to the towering buildings, and was caught up into a trance and beheld a beatific vision. He writes in the book: "Presently out of them will come palaces and noble places, free, high circumstances, and space and leisure, light and fine living for the sons of men. An epoch which was coaly and mechanical, commercial and adventurous is giving place almost automatically, to one that will be electrical and scientific, artistic and creative."[9] Notice carefully the words "almost automatically." They are perfect.

[8] J. B. Bury, *History of Freedom of Thought.* Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1913.

[9] H. G. Wells, *The Future in America.* Harper and Brothers, New York, 1906.

That glowing sun went down at noon. Browning's purple patch of poetry walked out of the pages of book into history: "Just when we are safest, there's a sunset touch." A premature sunset, and how swiftly and decisively it fell on that confident faith in "progress"! In the twilight, black fears crept from their holes as in Browning's description:

> "To rap and knock and enter in our soul
> Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring
> Round the ancient idol on his base again—
> The grand Perhaps."

Recall the words of Swinburne, written at the peak of the Victorian apocalyptic vision, in his carol to man, a substitute for a carol reputed once to have been sung from the skies:

> "Glory to man in the highest.
> For man is the master of things."

A grand mouth-filling call to worship! But how hollow it rings today! Go around the world in imagination and stand and sing that carol at appropriate places. Stand at the Menin Gate in northern France, which marks the region where two hundred thousand British men and boys laid down their lives. Take hold of the wings of the morning and drop down into Ethiopia. Stand almost anywhere in our devastated world today and try to get up heart to lift the tune, "Glory to man. . . . The master of things." We can at least see that whoever calls that tune must pay the piper an unbearable price. No wonder there are ears today newly opened to old

music in a different key—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace."

For the escalator has stopped running. We have learned that the "evolution" of blind trust can go into reverse. The rotogravure sections of the newspapers fling before our eyes every week ghastly pictures of the back-track of civilization to the jungle. The photographs of men, women, and children in gas masks all over Europe make them look exactly like their remote ancestors—subhuman gorillas. The skepticism about guaranteed evolution, carried over from biology to the social and political realm, has been clearly traced by Archbishop Söderblum in his Gifford Lectures, *The Living God:*

> Who can any longer believe in evolution? The assured belief that the world will become better of itself was a false doctrine doomed to be swept away by the iron besom of the world agony, . . . then confidence in development received an irreparable shock. Evolution was an idol which had not kept the promises it had made. The distressful state of the world compels our faith to take refuge in God. It is more difficult than it was to believe in evolution; perhaps it would pay better to believe in God.[10]

One of the clearest demonstrations of the logic by which many minds have been impelled to God as a ground of sanity and security has been made, by a strange irony, by words written for the purpose of bowing God out of the universe. They are words of

[10] Archbishop Söderblum, *The Living God.* Oxford University Press, 1933.

Professor James H. Leuba, in his *God or Man?* Writing about the Versailles Treaty, he says: "With relief and renewed confidence in Humanity [the capital H is the Professor's] one learns that at Versailles, in 1918, the High Contracting Parties left to man the responsibility for the war and for whatever success the Peace Treaty might have. They did not mention the God of the religions: they did not pretend to place their trust in him."[11] And so the result is an occasion for "relief and renewed confidence in Humanity"! Were more fatuous words ever set down on paper? If the Versailles Treaty is the high-water mark of what man can do without God, that is the best advertisement God has had in twenty centuries!

## V

The whole theme of the relation of theism to the structure of a social order takes on sharpened pertinence from the trend of the State to arrogate to itself the place of God, which so marks the world today. It is but another instance of the fact that the calendar moves with a circular motion rather than in a straight line. It has swung full circle to a Christian Year One in that the Christian interpretation of life is again faced with the issues and denials upon which the first-century Church looked out. Down every avenue of thought and action in that world was the image of Caesar. There it stood. The meeting was unavoidable, as unavoidable as the same meeting is today. Rudolf Eucken, the German philosopher,

[11] James H. Leuba, *God or Man?* Henry Holt and Company, 1933.

died in 1926, long before the name of Hitler had ever been heard by more than a handful even in Germany. There is a tragic impressiveness to Eucken's words, coming from his seizure in two sentences of this Germany, resurrection of the old first-century statue of Caesar:

> The spiritual life today is threatened by the fact that the omnipotent state is inclined to treat it, in all its branches, as a mere means toward the attainment of its own particular aims; to look upon science and art, and especially religion and education, with a view to what they achieve for the aims of the state, . . . an independent and genuine spiritual life can hardly offer too great an opposition to such a perversion, with its deification of human forms. . . . Nothing can save us from sinking to be mere puppets of the soulless mechanism of the state, if we do not find the power to maintain the life of the soul against all attempts at encroachment.

That issue has magnified and intensified until the most potent and sinister force in our world is the ghost of Caesar, as it assumes the deified form of the totalitarian State. That ghost does not represent the issue of the State in itself, but a State which draws to itself the attitudes of awe, veneration, and acknowledged imperative which belong to God. It booms out through the world its parody of the words of Jesus, "Render unto Caesar the things that belong to God." Even when it allows, tolerantly, the repetition of the original form of those words, "Render unto God the things that belong to God," it effectually blunts them by its ukase that the major issues

of life and politics are always Caesar's, the marginal incidentals are God's. Recall the scene in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* where the ghost of Caesar speaks to Brutus:

*Brutus:* Then I shall see thee again?
*Ghost:* Ay, at Philippi.

Those words echo again, "I will meet you at Rome, at Berlin, at Vienna." And if we listen carefully, we can hear the ghost of Caesar making other fateful appointments: "I will meet you in London, in Paris, in Washington, in Chicago, Los Angeles, and in every state capital in the United States." There are times when one is tempted to say that the only thing that can meet and cower the ghost of Caesar is the ghost of John Calvin. And, as stressed above, one of the real grounds of hope in the world today is that the ghost of John Calvin has heard the hour strike and is walking among men. But we need not put it in that way. It is, rather, that the only power adequate to face such an antichrist is God. Preparation for such a possible meeting demands the experience and preaching of the sovereignty of God. Without it the Church will be inevitably thrown into the rôle of a court chaplain to a State which has arrogated to itself the rôle of God. That challenge cannot be met by the complacent prayer of a Pharisee, "Lord, we thank thee that we are not as other nations—as Germany, or Italy, or Russia; we are wise and good enough to live in a democracy." A sovereign God must be

proclaimed in relevance to those detailed defeats and betrayals of democracy, and denials of the Christian valuation of personality, which inhere in our present orgy of gag laws, red hysterias, denial of civic rights, and the applauded violence of vigilantes.

## VI

The alternative of God or Caesar is one which is deeply rooted in human nature. The deification of the State is striking contemporary evidence of an old affirmation that man needs an Absolute, some object to which he can yield worship and allegiance, some imperative which he can acknowledge. This affirmation is endlessly denied in theory and endlessly supported in practice. If nature abhors a vacuum, human nature abhors an empty altar, and makes haste to fill the empty place with something. That the image of *Patria,* the State, should be set up today on the altar of millions of people is no strange, novel perversion. It is normal evidence that the altar was already empty of any undebatable loyalty, any supreme worship of God, and that something lower inevitably took its place. That is why, in the words of Arnold Toynbee, "the worship of one's country is the most widespread form of religion in the Western world today." The coming of the totalitarian State was well prepared for by the Great War. The war showed where the real allegiance of Western civilization was given, the high imperative which could successfully demand privation and death. More than that, the war was a titanic missionary evangeliza-

tion for nationalism. "Nationalism" was accepted as a word of salvation, the name which is above every name and to which every knee should bow and every tongue confess. The world learned well its indoctrination. There are two words which put this whole truth vividly. They are short four-letter words; they look and sound alike; they are as far apart as the poles. They are the words, "Hail!" and "Heil!" Men will either say "Hail!" to a divine Absolute or say "Heil!" to some tin-pot deity put in his place. The ancient proverb "When the half-gods go the gods arrive," is equally true in reverse, "When God goes, the half-gods arrive." The twentieth century is showing the truth working in reverse. The only word which can drown the metallic "Heil!" to half-gods is a "Hail!" to God.

Right here is the indispensable service of the foreign-missionary enterprise to theology and religion. If there were no other reasons for the continuation of foreign missions, one alone would be sufficient—its necessity as a redeeming agency from provincialism. Only by sharing an experience of God with the whole world can we keep the vision and experience of a universal God. The size of a man's God and a nation's God is always measured by the horizon of interest and effort. Contract that effort to the limits of a state, and God is contracted to a tribal chieftain made in the image of man. In Germany, the result is a little blond Aryan God. Make that contraction in Italy, and you have a dark swarthy God who speaks Italian and looks like Mussolini. Make that con-

traction in the United States and we have that familiar, ghastly image, a one-hundred-per-cent-American God. What we can never have from such a contraction is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## VII

Faith in God is the only effective support to the individual life in a world which is the playground of vast aggregates and vast impersonal forces.

It is too often forgotten that the principle of the worth of the individual personality cannot stand by itself in our world, nor can it stand in the strength of a merely horizontal civilization. It needs a guarantee and support, vertical in nature. In other words, if the worth of the individual man is to be a compelling faith, it must be derived from the Fatherhood of God. For look what is happening to the inherent worth of the individual in our world. It is being flattened out by a parade of juggernaut cars. It is denied by many phases of our present capitalism. It is cynically despised by a steadily increasing militarism. It is trampled on by Fascism. It is smothered by Communism. It cannot hang in midair. It needs foundations. The only foundations robust enough for a support for the inviolable worth of the individual are indicated in the cry of the psalmist, "The eternal God is my refuge."

How easily this is forgotten is seen in a recent book by Joseph Wood Krutch, *Was Europe a Success?* Summing up some convictions of his own, he

declares that he believes in "the sacredness of personality."[12] And as those words march across the page one cries out, "Halt, who goes there?" For that word "sacredness" is a religious word. What does "the sacredness of personality" come from? With profound respect for Mr. Krutch we may still ask, What right has he to believe in the sacredness of personality, he who declares, in *The Modern Temper,* that "living is merely a physiological process with only a physiological meaning, and that it is most satisfactorily conducted by creatures who never feel the need to attempt to give it any other"?[13] How firm a foundation for the "sacredness of personality" in that word, "merely physiological"! It is a striking instance of a very common process, pitching God out of the universe, and still using a vocabulary about man which is utterly meaningless without God.

## VIII

A God with real meaning for life, however, is a God of ethical theism. At the risk of repetition that is stressed again in this connection. We have had, during "the years of the locust," 1930-1936, a surfeit of talk from the pulpit about "getting back to God" as a cure for "the depression," and as a solution of mankind's every problem. But often it has lacked any trace of understanding of what getting back to

[12] Joseph Wood Krutch, *Was Europe a Success?* Farrar & Rinehart, New York, 1934.

[13] Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Modern Temper.* Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1929.

the Christian God, in terms of repentance and changed ways of life, would mean. A premature satisfaction in a sentimental expression of religion, cut off from its moral implications, is a persistent bane in the message and life of the Church. A preacher recently told a large congregation of the incident of Rudyard Kipling a generation ago when he was critically ill with pneumonia in New York. The preacher told how the nurse bent over the bed to hear Mr. Kipling say, "I want my Heavenly Father." "That," said the preacher, "is what the world needs more than everything else put together." The congregation was visibly impressed. Now that preacher was absolutely right—if he knew what he was talking about! But he gave no evidence that he did, no evidence that he had faced the tremendous moral and social implications of wanting our Heavenly Father in such a world as ours. For if we got our Heavenly Father, in the center of our life, it would mean a world turned upside down. Take Kipling himself. How much did he want his Heavenly Father, during all the years in which he was the crowned singer of a predatory imperialism—

> "Beneath whose awful hand *we*[14] hold
> Dominion over palm and pine,"

an imperialism which finally brought the world to devastation in a clash with other imperialisms founded on the same model? How deeply did he want his Heavenly Father while he was the poet

[14] Italics mine.

laureate of race pride and snobbery, with his "white man's burdens" and

> "Your new caught, sullen peoples,
> Half devil and half child"?

How well did he know what his Heavenly Father was like—Kipling, whose God has been well described as "a mechanized Allah with a taste for engineering"? Faith in the Christian God, if it is fundamental rather than sentimental, spreads out into every issue of the contemporary world.

Suppose it were granted that the first and supreme function of the Church today were not to bring to the world a program but a faith, not a blue print of a new society but a vital conception of God which will compel a revolution in society to harmonize with the will of that God. Two problems still remain: First, how will men get and retain such a faith, and, second, how may they effectively share it with the world? The answer to both questions lies not so much in the field of theological speculation or the multiplied use of familiar forms of devotion, as in the field of social struggle. In the last chapter of this book the potential contribution of participation in social struggle to the spiritual life and power of the Church will be considered. But it cannot be passed here without a word. We do not pick up a vital faith out of the air; it is in a real manner a reflection of our occupation. Without the vigorous and costly practice of love, worship of a God of love soon becomes hollow and dead. The kind of a God

we really believe in is largely determined by the quality and depth of our human contacts. The Church will be unable to retain or win a living God for its own life without getting down from the grandstand into the arena in a fellowship in struggle with men against those forces which deny brotherhood and make words about love a mockery. Where is God to be found? Paraphrasing old words, we may say that Gothic architecture will say, "He is not in me." The rubrics of liturgy will say, "He is not in me." The holy of holies where God is to be found is in the place of human need. "Where love is, God is." A sacrificial involvement in the struggle of men for more abundant life is not merely a necessary expression of faith. It is a necessary condition of having a real faith to express. A Church cannot repeat with any genuine conviction "I believe in God the Father Almighty, . . . and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord," if without agonizing and passionate struggle, it sees the children of that Heavenly Father used as mere things to be manipulated for profit, used as things to be hurled at each other, as missiles in war, used recklessly as things because they are not worth as much as a bale of cotton or a ton of coal. We cannot let the implications of a doctrine of God be trampled under foot without losing the doctrine itself.

## IX

In like manner, the effort to persuade a world of the reality of the Christian God calls not for a new

speculation but for a new spectacle—a spectacle of love in action with and for men. We have had a generation of intense straining in the realm of speculation, an impressive sum of intellectual effort in the apprehension and statement of Christianity which has borne large fruit. But that, after all, has not been pitted against the most formidable obstacle to faith. That obstacle is not intellectual skepticism. It is the very practical difficulty of making the Christian doctrine of God and man significant and credible in an environment from which the visible operation of that doctrine is so largely excluded. Many hands in Europe and America have been raised in horror over the "No-God Exhibit" of Soviet Russia. The museums devoted to the exposure of the tricks of a cunning priestcraft, the effective propaganda of a militant atheism, have been to many people a blasphemous scandal. Many of the pious, terribly shocked by a formal "No-God Exhibit" in Russia, have had neither eyes nor mind for a very informal and effective "No-God Exhibit" in America. That American exhibit is the result of no conscious planning to indoctrinate. It lies in the constant impact on life of the institutions and codes of society which by their very nature and operation are cynical denials of the reality of God, of an equal justice, of love, of brotherhood. The obstacle is not merely the rather simple one of the fool who says in his heart, "There is no God." It is the bombardment on the mind of a whole discordant medley of sounds, the noises of our modern world, the whirling of machines, the

metallic click of its cash registers, the rattle of its machine guns, the gasps of its victims. All these assault the eye, the ear, every sense, with the hypnotic suggestion: "There is no God. Look about you. Where do you see Him?"

The most effective work in the field of Christian apologetics in the future must be and will be done by those men and women working to bring about an order of life in which it will be possible to believe in God, an order in which the Christian message of love, as the basic reality in the universe, is not at such variance with the world as it impinges on men that that message must seem a baseless and romantic dream. It has been truly said that the hardest thing many children have to do is to learn good manners without seeing any. The hardest thing anyone has to do is to learn to say convincingly "God is love" without seeing much love in the concrete. There is no need to import into the Christian gospel the conception of love as a cosmic reality. It is there. There is a memorable suggestion of its presence in the much-discussed statue of Jesus, "Ecce Homo," by Jacob Epstein, first exhibited in London in March, 1935. It is a massive block of stone, eleven feet high, seven tons in weight. The head is nearly as large as the torso, with squat nose, thick sad lips, and great hands tied with a rope. To most people at first glance, to many permanently, it is an ugly face. There is no comeliness about him that we should desire him. No wonder that a member of Parliament demanded the removal of the statue as an

"offense against public decency." But the very phrase of denunciation reminds us that Jesus was "an offense against public decency" in Jerusalem. The effect of the statue is well described by Dean W. R. Matthews of Saint Paul's Cathedral: "An interpretation of One who cannot be defeated." At least, it is not a Boy-Scout Christ or an Aryan Christ. The great stone face pictures a Jesus who is an upthrust of something geological, a revelation of an eternal reality which lies in the center of the universe, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

## Chapter IV

## IMPLEMENTING A GOSPEL OF LOVE

IN the statue described in the closing paragraph of the preceding chapter, Epstein's "Ecce Homo," one of the striking details is the stout rope tightly tied about the hands of Jesus. That rope may well be held in mind as a disturbing symbol of a bound Christ, whose message of love is kept from doing its transforming work in the world by being denied hands with which to grasp forces which frustrate and block his purpose. It pictures the intense need of giving to a gospel of love implements, tools fitted to a mechanized age of great social and economic powers. To give to Christ's message hands, arms, shoulders, instruments, both for tearing down and building anew, is a first task if Christianity is to be more than a minor decoration on the surface of an unbelieving, pagan society. Athanasius held that the first principle of moral theology was to avoid confusing means with ends. A principle of the very immoral theology of much Christian teaching and preaching has been to discuss ends without any consideration of means. That is the very essence of sentimentalism. Yet the Church has continually called in its most eloquent and pleading voice, "Behold the Man," when the Man it pointed to was without hands, or implements, by which precept might be translated into deed, law, institution.

Before considering the necessary implementing of the Christian teaching of love as the bond of society, before asking what type of implementing is necessary to deal with entrenched and fortified privilege, it might be well to stress the use of immediate tools already provided, such elementary and familiar tools as the sense organs, the eyes and ears, the sensitive instruments for reporting on the outside world.

## I

These are the tools with which a Christian evaluation of the world must start. Their use is an indispensable preliminary. The will to fashion the instruments of social change must be stimulated and aroused by the report of eyes and ears on what is going on in God's world and what is happening to God's children in the process of that ongoing. It is that report which has been woefully lacking. Men have not learned to see the real action of economic and social forces, either near or those distant effects of the impersonal remote control which is so malign a feature of our industrial and economic world. The first step for a church toward social change is not the acceptance or glib repetition of a dogma but in the use of eyes. No creed that has had meaning for life ever began with "I believe." That is the end step of a process of experience, of awareness, eyesight, observation. Take that creed we all accept: "I believe that the earth is round." That did not begin with a sonorous repetition. It began with eyes, with somebody, and long lines of somebodies through the

centuries, looking at something. It was the same with the creeds of religion. It must be the same with social convictions, they begin in sharpened observation and deepened awareness.

That dedicated eyesight and the dedicated ear have been so often lacking. In the oldest cathedral of England there is around the wells of the nave a row of carved figures of saints. They all have the curious eyes of so many statues, with no pupils, literally stone blind. Blind saints behind stained glass—a disturbing representation of what has been and is a frequent mental and spiritual reality.

In Lillian Wald's book of reminiscences of her years in the Nurses' Settlement on the East Side of New York, *Windows on Henry Street,* there is a story of a young Jewish boy who one day ran excitedly into her office. He held out something in his hand. "Here, Miss Wald," he shouted, "hold my glass eye! There's a fight outside!"[1] He knew that a glass eye was no good in a fight!

There is a continual fight going on in the world outside the quiet of the sanctuary—the endless struggle against what Saint Paul called "the master spirits of this dark age." And "glass eyes" are no good in that fight!

The great tragedies of Christian history have come from so many in the churches looking out at the world with glass eyes.

How terribly easy to look out on our world with

[1] Lillian Wald, *Windows on Henry Street.* Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1934.

"glass eyes," blind eyes which fail to see the bruised shoulders of those on whom the burdens of our days rest heavily and cut cruelly; the terror in the eyes of those who have gone down into the valley of the shadow of unemployment, or the sure advance of the juggernaut of war which we are so frantically and lavishly preparing!

## II

Eyes and ears and all the senses are instruments of a necessary perception of wrong, and a necessary diagnosis. But diagnosis is not enough, either in medicine or religion. Even a probing diagnosis of social maladjustment and economic fracture is a sorry substitute for therapeutics.

We have had no lack of diagnostic sermons in the pulpit, which describe symptom after symptom, point out the gangrene of greed, and then, for the most part, dismiss the patient, or at best give a pious prescription of "the spirit of Christ" in very general terms, so that the whole process ends up in a descent of fog. It is often as though a physician might diagnose an injury by saying: "You have a compound fracture of the leg, here and here. Now, the thing to do is to get plenty of sleep, keep cheerful, and take an aspirin tablet." Diagnosis without proper remedy is cold cheer.

The need for more than description of what is wrong is illustrated in an ironical happening reported in the newspapers last year. A private yacht, named *Alamyth,* was disabled a hundred miles or

more out from New York and was in real danger. Their radio equipment was in working order, however, and they sent out S O S calls. Then they gathered together eagerly about the radio to pick up news of a rescue party. After a long wait they were thrilled to hear the name of their ship mentioned by a broadcaster. But all they heard was Lowell Thomas broadcasting to the universe at large a full description of just what was the trouble with their engine and all the details of their plight! That was hardly music to ears that were straining for a word of help and salvation. That company in a derelict ship listening to a diagnosis of their calamity is a not very distorted picture of many a congregation in these days, treated to another diagnosis of a society adrift, but no help in concrete terms, no clear and honest facing of adequate means of rescue and salvation.

## III

It ought not to be, and is not, necessary to devote any space to stressing the truth that the kingdom of God is not to be identified with any economic or political program. That is an elementary axiom which should underlie every discussion of Christian religion in social action. The kingdom of God is always something other and beyond any form of social or economic organization. But such a reiteration may be pardoned, in order to safeguard against misunderstanding of the position discussed in this chapter and throughout the whole volume. There

is a statement used by Jesus in regard to himself which has a definite application to his teaching. He said, "The Son of man hath not where to lay his head." That has been true throughout nineteen hundred years of history, is true today, and will always be true. The Son of man cannot lay down his head, cannot be completely at home, in any man-made habitation of thought and practice. He will always be, in a profound sense, homeless, for nothing can contain him. Chesterton's lines, in his noble Christmas Carol, at least suggest that truth:

> "To the place where God was homeless
> And all men are at home."

The attempt, of course, is continually made to crowd Jesus into a theory. Many have said " 'Lo, here! and Lo, there!' is the complete expression of Jesus." Socialism is often described as the economic expression of Christianity; also a slaveholding society has made the same claim. Monarchy has been fervently hailed as the political form of Christianity. So has democracy, and philosophic anarchy. But Jesus cannot be held in any jail. He eludes them all. Right here is the fallacy expressed in the title of E. Stanley Jones's valuable book *Christ's Alternative to Communism.* Communism is a definite economic theory and order. The title seems to indicate that Christianity has an alternative theory and order, which can be substituted for Communism. It suggests a false parallel. We might and do have a Christian criticism of Communism. We might conceiv-

ably have a Christian addition to Communism or some exercise in subtraction from Communism. But not a true alternative. Christianity will not condense into any definite economic system. The position taken in this volume is that no economic rearrangement can be considered the goal of Christianity or its necessary expression. But also that Christianity must be ready to accept any economic rearrangement found on the basis of the most realistic analysis possible to promise the securest foundation for justice, brotherhood, and opportunity for humanity. Such rearrangement is something to be taken in its stride as an incidental on its way to the kingdom of God on earth. A Christianity which balks either from fear or inertia at a real transfer of power, one which ties itself to any *status quo,* has betrayed itself.

In this connection particular watchfulness is needed to guard against the snare in the much-used phrase, "The social teachings of Jesus." That is frequently taken to mean that there is in the Gospels a specific body of teaching on the procedure of changing social institutions. That is not true. A wise man said not long ago, "I have looked carefully through the New Testament and can't find any Five-Year Plan in it." He was right. There is nothing but a Five-Million-Year Plan in it. New-Testament scholarship has abundantly made its point—that it is only by the distortion of Jesus, by reading into his words meanings which they did not have for him, that men are able to find any technique for social

change. To find it in Jesus is an unethical trick, like pulling out of a hat a rabbit which has first been put into the hat while the audience was not noticing. That "rabbit trick" has been done to the Gospels by all sorts of propagandists. But it has worn thin. In dealing with the structure of society there is only one honest position for a Christian preacher or teacher to take—that of Paul on several occasions when he said, in effect, "I have no revelation from the Lord on this point, but here is the line of action which loyalty to his principle seems to demand." Such honesty will rob our words of the pleasant dogmatism, "This is the way, walk ye in it." But it will save us from the violence of seizing Jesus and binding him a captive to our particular chariot, whether it be capitalism, socialism, the single tax or social credit. To take the teaching of Jesus, his absolutes as they might be called, and then on the basis of the most honest and faithful analysis of the economic and social situation that we can make or find, determine what changes those absolutes demand, is the reasonable service of a Christian community, and its inescapable task.

## IV

With the foregoing axioms in mind, then, the argument which follows is not announced as part of the gospel. It is the recording of the conviction that a rigorous and unprejudiced analysis of the operation of our economic system will show that if a gospel of love is to be adequately implemented in such a

world as ours, the implements required include the social ownership and control of the principal means of production. Nothing less can provide an order of life which will provide a secure basis for the welfare of a whole population or deserve the name "Christian." Such ownership and control is a necessity to social health in the mechanized order we live in today. We must either give up Jesus as our standard or else give up our acceptance of our present society. Let us face just what we mean. Such social control and ownership will be a real change in the sense of a transfer of power, as much a revolution as the dissolution of the feudal system. It will mean a breaking up of the pattern in which the really important decisions, affecting the whole population, are made by a group, small and insignificant in number but terribly significant in power. The turning point of those decisions is the desire and hope of profit. It is not a pretty pattern, and its results have not been pretty for millions.

When Dante, in his journey through Hell, reached the dwelling of the God of Riches, he wrote, "Here we found wealth, the great enemy." Dante, on a journey through the mechanized world today, would find the great enemy more deeply entrenched, with more amazing techniques put into the hands of greed than any his Hell could show. The great enemy is not so much wealth itself as in the system which, in the words of Professor Fetter already quoted, "intercepts the gains of progress" and deflects them into the hands of a few and thus makes for an enormous con-

centration of power. We are only scratching the surface of that situation if we are concerned with nothing beyond the stabilization of present inequalities.

Julian Huxley, the English scientist, has clearly pictured this. Looking into the future, he said that the coming years will present one of two pictures—either science in chains to the profit motive, or science set free to do its possible service to human welfare. We shall have the immeasurable powers of science in shackles to private gain, by which they are at present so largely held, or science liberated in a social order which fits our means of production.

The present bondage of science to profit-making has been keenly felt and ironically described by scientists themselves. In a volume entitled *The Frustration of Science,* published in 1934, Dr. P. M. S. Blackett writes, "I believe that it is not at all irrelevant to science, but, on the contrary, of enormous importance, which of the two, the workers, or the owners, dominates the state. Owner-domination, in its capitalist and swiftly maturing Fascist forms, has transformed science from a benign Prometheus into a murderous Cyclops who destroys even his sheep." In the same volume Sir Alfred Daniel Hall agrees with what Lenin said a generation ago: "It has not become more difficult to produce food; it has become more difficult for the workers to obtain it." Other distinguished scientists show that aviation, architecture, metallurgy, chemistry, medicine, and biology are all under bond, not to keep the peace, but to

maintain profits, no matter what the cost to humanity at large.[2]

It is vain to expect the liberation of the powers of science to serve humanity to come as a voluntary emancipation by those who profit by the present control. Yet that delusive hope is the sole reliance of those who depend on persuasion, without implementation by an actual transfer of economic power. Our most eloquent appeals to idealism are futile if we are willing to accept as final the sign "No Trespassing" which the holders of power and privilege erect around their privileges. As long as the Church acquiesces in an economic deadline marked by entrenched financial power; as long as it respectfully obeys the command, "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther," so long it will leave unhealed the basic hurts of society. We are living in a Bluebeard civilization. Not that there are monsters in it, but that there is one forbidden room which men are ordered not to enter, on pain of excommunication or the revenges which controlling groups know so well how to take. That room is the sanctity of private profit. But in that room are all the great power switches of our modern world. As long as we stay out of that room, we stay out of the real task of securing social justice and an order which serves human needs.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in a significant statement, which has received far less attention than its impor-

[2] *The Frustration of Science,* by various authors. With a Foreword by Frederick Soddy. W. W. Norton and Company, New York, 1934.

tance deserves, has put his finger deftly on the crucial point in the relation between business and social welfare. In the introduction to *Toward Liquor Control,* he says: "Only after the profit motive is eliminated is there any hope of controlling the liquor traffic in the interest of a decent society. To approach the problem from any other angle is only to tinker with it and insure failure. This point cannot be too heavily stressed."[3] True, it cannot be too heavily stressed, about the liquor problem, or of any great means of production. Since Mr. Rockefeller's pointed words were written we have come to see more clearly than ever that they are emphatically true of the munitions industry. What is true of liquor and arms is true of steel, of coal, of transportation, of light and power. To approach any of these from any other angle but the profit motive is "only to tinker with it."

This interesting point in current history has been reached, making a new milestone, the admission by many of the most committed devotees of the present capitalism, that if it is to be maintained at all, it must deliver service and values which it is not now producing. Chapter and verse of many such admissions could be given. Let two suffice. The first is from Laurence Dennis. He says, bluntly, "If capitalism is to endure, society must develop adequate measures to insure steady and full employment for

[3] Raymond B. Fosdick and Albert L. Scott, *Toward Liquor Control.* With a Foreword by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Harper and Brothers, New York, 1934.

capital, management, and labor."[4] A good trick, if capitalism can do it! But there is little evidence that it can be done; while the demonstration that it is not being done is too complete to admit of discussion. The other admission is from Dean Donham, of the Harvard School of Business Administration. He says, "The motive of intelligent and farsighted selfishness is insufficient, in my judgment, to handle the problems which must be solved if we are to avoid the dangers of a debacle." Then he goes on to say, "We must find an increasing number of men who will do everything that they do in their business from a social standpoint, who will think within business in terms of social values."[5] That is a stout reliance indeed! No one who stands within the historic Christian tradition would for a moment advocate ceasing the evangelistic endeavor to bring a principle of love into individual lives, or striving for the conversion of souls. But Dean Donham's solution as a sole reliance, without social action, as a means of breaking the strangle hold of a mighty profit system, is a high-water mark of romantic optimism. It demands a psychological miracle such as has never happened in history. There is no refutation to the point which Reinhold Niebuhr has stressed so insistently and effectively, that "no civilization ever equalizes its privileges without the creation of new

[4] Laurence Dennis, *Is Capitalism Doomed?* Harper and Brothers, 1932.

[5] W. B. Donham, *Business Adrift.* McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., New York, 1931.

political and economic power to set against the power of those who appropriate an undue share of society's wealth."

One is reminded in this connection of an incident in the Gettysburg campaign in the Civil War. Heroic old John Burns, on the news of the approach of Lee's army, rallied the home guards of the town, including several crippled veterans of former wars, and led them out along the road leading westward. The straggling company had not gone far when they came face to face with the first column of the strongest fighting machine on earth, the Army of Northern Virginia. It was magnificent but it was not war! The strength of the home guards against such a concentration of military power was not unlike the strength of a sole reliance on exhortations to idealism, when dealing with the massed might of modern industry and finance.

The danger of a superficial analysis of the facts is well illustrated by the enormous popularity of the word "recovery" in the past six years. There is a tide in the affairs of words which leads on to fortune. The word "recovery" has ridden on such a crest that it has been the most popular word in the American dictionary. It has had the befogging effect of leading many people within the churches to imagine that the Christian goal were the recovery of something we once had, rather than the achievement of something we never had, or came within a long long distance of having. Go back again in imagination to that mythical golden day—1929. Over twenty million people

living on or under the wage level needed for decent subsistence—is that what we want to recover? Five million share days in Wall Street, the scramble for swollen profit from the manipulation of the labor of others—is that what we want to recover? A decreasing share of the national income for labor during the boom years—shall we strive to recover that? A prosperity that dealt out overstuffed lives to the few and bleakness to multitudes! God save us from such a recovery! Yet that is all we can hope for, if we merely perpetuate the system which brought those results.

## V

It ought to be abundantly clear by now that reliance on regulation of great corporations owning and controlling national resources and means of production, as a means of making the present system serve the end of the welfare of the whole, is a futile hope. We have had a long history of continually frustrated effort, in which the agencies of regulation have become themselves regulated by the powers they were designed to control. That is the sorry history of Public Utilities Commissions. None but the most naïve could look for much effective curbing of these "dinosaurs" by regulation, based on the experience of the last fifty years. A schoolboy gave this illustration of the word "foolishness": "An elephant hanging over a cliff with his tail tied to a daisy." That measures rather exactly the right amount of hope to be placed in regulation of such

concentration of power as steel, oil, or public utilities, as a means of ending the evils inherent in such power.

We have also had the recent instructive spectacle of the New Deal—four years of attempted regulation and reform. There have been enormous social values in the whole human outlook of the Roosevelt administration which will be a permanent asset to the country. It will be impossible ever again to go back to the position that starvation is a merely local issue. The recognition by the administration of the responsibility of the federal government for the life and welfare of its citizens is a real gain, economic, moral, and spiritual. But the New Deal, as a desperate attempt to make the capitalistic system work, without making any change in its basic form or framework, has been a costly series of experiments in ineffective palliatives. It touched none of the fundamental problems. When the promise to "drive the money-changers from the temple" is set beside the strengthened position of Big Business, the gap is impressive. Billions have been paid out in doles but almost none of them out of national income, and consequently the burden has not been laid on wealth. It is carefully adjusted to the backs of little children who are due to pay in twenty years and more. The very effect of the loans to pay the doles will put more money and power into the hands of the small per cent of the people who already control three quarters of the resources of the country. For they have loaned the government the money to be paid back

with interest. No effective support has been given to workers' bargaining power, in such a manner that a real increase in purchasing power could result. What happened in the telephone industry during two years of the depression could be paralleled in many others. In two years the telephone companies cut payrolls twenty-two per cent while dividends were raised twenty-five per cent.[6] The report of the Bureau of Internal Revenue for 1933 makes clear that the result of the New Deal that year was to increase the inequality in the distribution of wealth, compared with 1932. More was received in business profits and in profits from the sale of property of all kinds while less was paid in wages and salaries. Manufacturing corporations, with the aid of the N. R. A. in price-fixing and control of production, nearly doubled their net incomes. The demonstration of "self-reformation" without disturbing the profit system does not hold out any very exciting promise for the future.

One of the most conclusive pictures of the circumventing by business the attempted regulation for the sake of decreasing unemployment comes not from a political opponent of the New Deal but from one of its administrative officers, Aubrey Williams, chief assistant to Harry L. Hopkins, in the Relief Administration. The associated press thus reports him:

"Mr. Williams declared there had been a gain in business, but that speaking generally, it has put com-

[6] Report of Division of Economic Research of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. May 17, 1934.

paratively few people to work. Mr. Williams attributed the apparent paradox to increased efficiency which permits employers to produce more goods than before with fewer men.

"Mr. Williams said there had been a drop in the number of people on relief, but he attributed this largely to a hard-boiled policy under which the rolls were combed of ineligibles.

"As fast as they go from relief to jobs we get as many new ones on relief who have exhausted their savings," he asserted. "Even the National Industrial Conference Board says there is more unemployment now than a year ago. Business absorbs new business without increasing employment. They get a dividend out of it, but no new jobs are given. We are not feeling any benefit as far as most of our clients are concerned." He concluded with a warning that "unless industry shares increased business with workers the unemployment problem will not be solved by a business pickup."[7] Back again to the crux of the whole problem—the lust for profits blocking the functioning of the profit system!

These frank words of Mr. Williams picture a strange but rather exact economic parallel to the story of the Pool of Bethesda in the gospel story. The worker has the same history of frustration as the cripple who, when the waters were stirred and there was a chance of being healed, was always crowded out by someone else. The disparity between

[7] The *New York World-Telegram*, September 26, 1935.

profits and wages under the New Deal is only another chapter in the long history of labor being elbowed out of the way during a stirring of economic waters.

As long as the leaders of organized Christianity refuse to face honestly and courageously the obstacles to the Christian purpose which are inherent in a competitive system based on private profit, just so long will they not be facing the crucial issues in the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. A woman whose grandson took her to a college football game watched the action for quite a while, and then exclaimed, "Isn't it marvelous how the two teams always manage to line up right opposite each other!" There is something quite as marvelous in the life of churches, how very often they happen *not* to line up against the real opposition!

There was a keen psychological insight in the technique of the old evangelism, in its insistence that conversion and peace and power were dependent on what was called "coming clear through." As long as something was kept out of sight and held back, there was a fatal unreality. That found expression in an old gospel song,

> "My all is on the altar;
> I'm waiting for the fire."

There is no use waiting for the fire unless something is on the altar. Over a large part of the churches there has been a vain waiting for fire, because not very much was on the altar.

A phrase from colonial New England history which has a quaint ring about it is "the half-way covenant." That phrase was used to describe the arrangement by which those children of believers who had rejected the Calvinist creed of their fathers could still be admitted to the communion. In that compromise they were still included in the church although religion had never been a personal profession. The phrase "half-way covenant" might well describe a very different thing today—the people within the church willing to go "half way" in dealing with the root causes of economic collapse, of maldistribution of income, war. Half way—but not the whole way necessary. A half-way church is destined to be bound by the shallows and miseries of a delusive premature satisfaction.

## VI

The recognition of the sort of ultimate implementation necessary to secure and maintain economic and social health, however, still leaves up for consideration that word of insistent and immense meaning—*meanwhile*. We have only a very naïve conception of the realities of our world unless we think in terms of a long, long "meanwhile," during which the present order will certainly undergo changes, but in basic structure will persist. To turn from the difficult and demanding problems of an immediate "meanwhile," and take refuge in the repetition of any formulas, as a sort of chant, is an empty futility. A great deal of scorn is heaped on what are called

empty theological formulas. It ought not to be forgotten, though it is frequently overlooked, that economic and social formulas may be just as empty. In both cases there may be validity in the theories, but such validity never comes from the exercise of repetition. The formulas of radical economic change may become a sort of magic incantation, like *"ene mene mine mo"*—sonorous, but not wonder-working, whether pronounced on a soapbox or in a pulpit. There is the necessity of the immediate step, toward the alleviation of misery, the closer approximation to justice, the little bit of possible curbing of predatory power, continued in season and out of season. The strategy involved is that of lending strength to all efforts within the realm of possible achievement, which make in any degree for a more Christian world, yet without any benumbing delusion that such steps even when successful will reach the major obstacles. Such "meanwhile" efforts will furnish the necessary new starting points for further extension of social control, will furnish the indispensable experience necessary for more fundamental struggles, will help to develop the new economic and social power to oppose those who now hold a vastly disproportionate share of the wealth and power of society. Nothing could be more imaginary and naïve than the idea that a socialized economic order will be achieved by some kind of a sudden jump from one pure theoretical form of society to another pure theoretical form. This is often pictured as though it would be as complete and simple and sudden as cross-

ing the frontier of one country into another, abruptly ceasing to speak one language and starting to speak another. It is simple enough to knock down a plaster bust of Adam Smith, and put up one of Karl Marx. But to imagine that such a process bears any relation to the realities of American economic or political life is hardly worthy of the nursery. Every effort toward economic planning, no matter how frustrated; every struggle for a more genuine bargaining power for labor, no matter how defeated; every step toward control of profiteering utility companies, no matter how circumvented, is a preparation of the forces of opinion and power leading to a more socialized society.

Any glance at the urgent "meanwhile" issues from which Christian forces cannot turn away without dark and shameful betrayals of responsibility would involve a survey of the whole social entanglement. Only four such issues will be mentioned here, as significant samples: the threat of Fascism, labor, utilities, and civil liberties.

The word "Fascism," particularly as used in the United States, is rapidly becoming an India-rubber word, stretched so far in all directions, to cover what a particular speaker does not like, that it is in danger of losing its specific quality. Sometimes it is used to cover any form of conservatism. Sometimes it is used to conjure up the coming to this country of the exact shapes of Italian and German Fascism, with blithe disregard of quite different history, mental climate, and conditions. Yet underneath the stretch-

ing, there are common features, which like linguistic roots, appear in different forms in different languages. That common root, in Italy, in Nazi Germany, in its incipient but clear forms in the United States, seems to be the disposition and trend to maintain capitalism by violence. It is shown in the readiness of the ruling economic powers in democratic and partly democratic countries, in times of crisis when the firm continuance of capitalism is threatened, to throw over the forms of democracy in order to keep the existing order from being displaced by socialization. Any threatening socialization in this country may well seem distant enough. But expressions of the desperate determination to prevent any shift to new foundations are too clear to be doubted. The present gag laws, red hysterias, the denials of civil liberty, the repression of labor with martial law, and the applauded lawless violence—these are already routine features of the day's news. They make justification for George Soule's description of Fascism as "the most repulsive convulsion of a dying capitalism."

The prospects of the Church's being a formidable bulwark against increasing Fascist tendencies in the United States put a great strain on one's imagination and hope. John Bennett in his penetrating book, *Social Salvation,* rates the possibilities of the Church playing that rôle rather high. But it is difficult to share his comparative optimism in that regard. There is in the traditional outlook and mentality of the Protestant Church much which is fertile soil

for a Fascist movement. Fascism has usually had a middle-class support, an appeal to the class interests, and prejudices of that group. Time alone can show whether the middle-class outlook or the Christian outlook will be controlling in the churches. In addition, there are within the churches a large multitude of people who are far more deeply concerned for order than they are for justice. Many are liable to look upon the strong arm of violence and virile disregard for democratic forms as a saviour from disorder and the approach of change. It is the old alternative of Barabbas or Christ. When that choice was first offered to a populace, the voices of those crying for Barabbas, the man of force and violence, prevailed. There is the real danger that history will repeat itself. This is no reason why this should be inevitably so, but if it is not so, it will be because the Church has recognized this movement as a real anti-Christ and has dedicated to opposing it, its heart, mind, and strength, with an intensity by no means yet evident. It will involve the recognition that democracy is not so much something merely to be preserved, for we have only a shadow of the real thing, but, rather, something to be achieved. There must also be the intellectual and spiritual exercise sufficient to make clear Fascism's blasphemous denial of the whole scale of Christian values.

An inescapable "meanwhile" obligation of a clear-seeing Church is the strengthening of the power of labor. That is a half-century program, certainly. Here again is an obstacle within the walls of organ-

ized religion which will not come out without much prayer and fasting. It lies in the enormous difficulty of securing clear understanding of the part which the increase in the power of labor must play in the securing of a more Christian society. There is also the difficulty of quickening effective sympathy with labor. The trouble is not that there are not forceful declarations of church bodies on the rights of labor. There are plenty and will be many more. In spite of the easy dismissal of such statements they have had great value as standards and commitments. There is also a growing group of rigorous thinking preachers—with a pathetically smaller company of laymen—who see that any real winning of a new social order will involve a struggle between opposing forces, and that power of laboring groups must be created and shaped. The heart of the difficulty is the deep-seated indifference, fear of and antipathy (the word is none too strong) to labor on the part of the middle-class groups who compose the overwhelming majority of the churches. Glaring evils within many labor unions are very naturally seized upon as a justification for that attitude. A real part of the trouble is that labor is not in the churches in any appreciable numbers. The Latin historian Suetonius records that when the Emperor Claudius, acting as high priest, officiated in a religious ceremony, he gave orders that all common laborers and slaves should withdraw.[8] A similar selective result

[8] Quoted in S. J. Case, *The Social Triumph of the Ancient Church.* Harper and Brothers, New York, 1933.

has all too often been a feature of Christian worship. This has come, not as the result of a formal edict, or set purpose, but through the gradual trend in the churches to become class institutions, with membership so largely drawn from middle and upper classes, with the inevitable result that the organization reflects the economic interests of the membership. It will be a task of long patient teaching and action, to bring to the rank and file of the churches the understanding that a strong labor movement, empowered for effective collective bargaining, is the best police force, and the only adequate one, for winning and holding a humane and Christian standard of wages. It is also the only sure reliance for the widespread increase of purchasing power, on which a mass production depends for its functioning. There are few episodes in recent church history more worth pondering than the session of the Congregational Union Assembly of England at Bradford in 1892, when Kier Hardie was shouted down for a passionate speech charging the churches with turning their backs on the laboring classes and with being content to get "respectable congregations." Hardie was a man of passionate religious faith, but his faith in the churches as agents of social righteousness suffered a total eclipse and he turned to politics. There was then, and has been multiplied since, abundant justification of Hardie's charge. Unless there is a real revolution in spirit and outlook in this area of relationship to labor, it will mean a betrayal of obligation and missing of opportunity.

The whole field of civil liberties lies close to labor, for the real "hot spot" of civil liberties today and in the future is in labor disputes and conflicts. A Church which proclaims devotion to the cause of civil liberties in the abstract, or only when its own liberties might be threatened, but is indifferent to the denial of civil liberties to labor in conflict and crisis, will be quite apart from the real struggle. The fight for civil liberties of the Bill of Rights, is not fought in libraries or churches or decorous assemblies. It is being fought on picket lines, before mill gates, in labor meetings and in courts where striking workers need powerful defense. If the Church is to assert the right of the conscience of Christians against the power of a State over the conscience, it must be far more concerned than it ever has been yet for the civil liberties of all citizens. It must see sharply that in this struggle, so often now regarded by church people as a far away, tiresome bore, an affair of undesirable "agitators," is the hope of that freedom of discussion and expression upon which the development of a Christian public opinion utterly depends.

A final example of an inescapable "must" is in the field of dealing with public utilities. A crucial question is whether the ownership of some shares of utility stocks or bonds will determine the attitude of church members on a great question of social welfare affecting millions of people. The Church cannot fulfill its pastoral business of protecting sheep against thieves and robbers without dealing with monopolies of such necessities as light, heat, and

power. The words "thieves and robbers" are hard ones, but have been abundantly justified. One does not need to recount the rise and fall of the Insull empire to cite justification. One of the most convincing documents is the report of the New York Power Authority to President Roosevelt in November, 1934, which, with unassailable specification, discloses that the total overcharge by the companies producing and distributing electricity in the northeastern states, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New England, is estimated to be approximately $194,000,000 annually out of a bill of $681,000,000 now paid to the utility interests. That represents a toll, or in less gracious words, an overcharge, of $28 per family for the seven million consumers living in those states. Will anyone say that is not a moral issue?

## VII

Embedded in the whole issue of implementing ideals to give them power lies the problem of possible violence. When we talk about developing power in labor for coming struggles, when we say that it is totally unjustified to look for a holding and owning class, now deriving great wealth and power from their grasp on the means of production, to voluntarily surrender that power, we use language which inevitably presents the picture of possible violence involved in a real transfer of economic power. What is to be the attitude to violence of those working for a socialized society as a means of

achieving justice and giving opportunity to the moral and spiritual potentialities of life?

All that can be offered here is the bare mention of some lines of consideration which seem essential to a facing of that question.

One first consideration is a recognition of the real gain to moral honesty in this generation through the convincing demonstration of Reinhold Niebuhr that there is violence now going on and has been going on. He has shown in a most impolite and disturbing manner that all of us in any favorable economic position, even to what seems a modest degree, owe our privileges to some form of violence. Even the gentlest, pacifistic professor, whose salary comes from investments, is very probably living on the fruits of past and present ruthlessness. The violence is so remote, has been so well covered with a seemly mantle, like the grass which grows over a shell hole in an old battlefield, that it is forgotten. This does not justify future violence, but it does mightily clear the air of cant and hypocrisy. That helps.

With that beginning there are three things which may well serve as guides for thinking. In the first place, in no field has there been more of what has already been called "baptizing the future," that is, of discussing future events with all the definiteness and assurance that belongs rightly only to past events. There is no justification in the knowledge of anyone for predicting the degree and extent of violence which will accompany real change in the economic pattern in America. There has not yet been enough

experiment in the use of nonviolent forms of compulsion to justify a final and dogmatic judgment concerning their strength. The next half century will undoubtedly see a wide variety of experimentation, yielding data not now available. There can be, and has been, a large amount of waste mental motion, discussion as to what one should do in hypothetical situations. Quite a bit of discussion concerning proper action when the "barricade" stage of revolution comes, is like a discussion by a party in an automobile while crossing the George Washington Bridge, in New York City, embarked on a cross-continental tour, about where they shall stop for gas on leaving Denver, Colorado. It might be possible that a better "close-up" of the gasoline situation in Denver will be available when they get a bit nearer. Certainly, no prediction of the future possibilities of a distant scene is sufficient to swerve those most deeply concerned with Christian values and ends in society from the persistent effort to make possible real change without wars of violence. Call it a forlorn hope if you will. Christianity has been a succession of forlorn hopes. It has never, except in dark days of treason to its genius, bet on a "sure thing." A writer recently made the confession that he liked best the type of mystery story which was not browbeaten by the probable but "marched just inside the limits of the possible." Christianity is exactly that kind of a mystery story, again and again marching just inside the limits of a possible.

In seeking such a march there is a compulsion on

the Christian groups to have such a real part in the momentum for social change that they may be able to exert a real influence guiding it into nonviolent forms of force, and if and when that is not successful, to mitigate violence and reduce hatred. Amid all the pleas for realism today it is well to be realistic about violence, especially on two points—its terribly dangerous character, and its futility. Granted that there is violence by powerful groups today, that we are living on its fruits, those of us who are in any sense living in comfortable security. No real contribution to the situation is made by a disregard of what a violent class war would bring in its train. If we allow to pass from mind the disruption and chaos, the blood, waste, and the measureless suffering which outright class war will inevitably bring, we stop doing accurate thinking and take to mooning. The liability of revolution is that its possible benefits will be destroyed by the disintegrating effect of its means. Hatred, let loose, knows no boundaries and has no ears for a command to halt. Heywood Broun has put this elemental fact about human nature in pungent and homely words: "It is my experience in shower baths that the hot water is very difficult to start and even harder to turn off. The hatred which may be very necessary to storm a citadel will often live on and on for months and even years after the battle has been won. Many an old Indian killer ended up by a mad career of blazing away at cigar-store emblems."

But if we reject violence, on ethical and religious

grounds, that very rejection, if it is not to be an insufferable indulgence in pious hypocrisy, impels us to bend every effort to make possible the success of nonviolent forces making for change.

## VIII

One step farther in clarification of the issues of religion today is necessary. That step is the recognition that a merely devotional religion, moving in the realm of subjective religious experience, plays into the hands of the powers seeking to maintain the *status quo* and of movements determined to maintain that order by violence. With a wealth of historical fact and documentation Paul B. Means, in his *Things That Are Caesar's,* has demonstrated the unconscious preparation which types of German pietism made for the Nazi regime of Hitler. After pointing out that Pietism was a natural reaction to the formalism of the state-church system, he writes:

> In making life more inward and personal and in helping to train a type of character obedient, self-denying, active in service to country and loyal to family ties, it made real contributions to German life. But with its essential emphasis on personal salvation from sin, its vision was limited almost exclusively to the individual. It failed to develop any large social program other than that of saving the lost individual and of converting heathen. It remained, in the main, an aristocratic class movement, and did not assist in any fundamental social transformation as did the Wesleyan Movement, its parallel in England. With its overemphasis upon individual sin and salvation and its puritanical denial of the validity of basic natural instincts, it contributed to the

religious confusion of the postwar years. One of the modern Nazi criticisms of this type of religion was based on its denial of a heroic and healthy-minded attitude toward life.[9]

The same liability is tied in with a vigorous and fruitful contemporary movement, centering in the realm of personal devotional religion, Buchmanism, or to use its preferred name, the Oxford Group Movement. The Rev. J. C. Hardwick, in a recent article in *The Modern Churchman,* entitled "The Intellectuals in Retreat," argues that Buchmanism is one emotional trend toward Fascism, along with the point of view of T. S. Eliot. He thus illustrates his fears:

The defeatist attitude of the intellectuals, regrettable and harmful in itself, has also an unhealthy influence upon the cultural underworld, as it may be termed. Under the shadow of Mr. Eliot, and doubtless repudiated by him, Buchmanism grows up. What is wrong with Buchmanism? it may be asked. Does it not make our young people healthy and hearty, and help them ease some of their complexes by unburdening their souls to one another? Doubtless this is so, but the point is that our young people do not need their emotions stirred as much as their minds shaking up. In any case, Buchmanism is an "escape," and its ultimate destiny is to be an ally of Fascism. As the acutest of our younger critics, Mr. A. H. Auden, has pointed out, when Groupism expands beyond the limits of a small group, it must have a program, and what other program can a movement of that kind have than some form of reactionary

[9] Paul B. Means, *Things That Are Caesar's.* Round Table Press, New York, 1935. Reprinted by permission.

politics? Groupism is an attempt to sidestep the generous ardor of youth. But it is only because the intellectuals are in retreat that such follies are possible.

## IX

Does all this stress on implementing a gospel of love with the tools of social action seem like a strange and questionable detour off the main road of the Christian tradition? It is not surprising that it should so appear to large numbers. Our ears echo with the sound of increasing voices, many with accents of a sincerity which cannot be questioned, warning that the Christian religion must be fenced in to operate solely within the field of individual experience and the proclamation of abstract ideals. Very frequently the exhortations to the Church to stay within those fields, come from those who profit greatly from present conditions. Out of many possible expressions of this grave concern lest religion may burst through its stained-glass prison, let one suffice. Here are words written in the fall of 1935 by a prominent official of one of the country's largest business concerns. He said: "In this present depression, which is above all a breakdown of character, the Church should keep aloof from specific prescriptions. It lacks knowledge and experience in the field of economics. It should play its great rôle in the realm of moral principles, inculcating in the people of this country what we need most for our economic as well as our moral welfare: honesty, justice, industry, bravery, co-operation, brotherly love."

Those are the words of Jasper E. Crane, vice-president of E. I. DuPont de Nemours & Co., which made hundreds of millions of dollars during the World War. Notice that he mentions six principles in the realm of which "the Church play its great rôle." Take four out of the six—honesty, justice, co-operation, brotherly love. If any one of these four ceases to be an airy nothing and acquires a local habitation and a name, forces are set in motion which, if carried to their logical conclusion, must knock the private munitions business, with its mountains of profit, into a cocked hat. To say this is not to accuse Mr. Crane of any conscious personal hypocrisy. The issue is never so beautifully simple as that. It is an instance of something far more subtle and complex—the economic determination of religious ideas.

To the charge that Christianity is invading the field of business, there is a forthright and complete answer. That answer has been made many times, and needs to be made until it shines like the sun lighting up a whole continent. It is that the Christian religion has not made a raid into the foreign territory of business but that business has invaded the field of religion. It has invaded fields for which Christianity has inalienable responsibility—the supreme worth of personality, the safeguarding of the potentialities of life and justice. If one wishes to get the most convincing experience of the Christian compulsion to social change, the proper starting point is not from any economic theory but from the pastoral

task of shepherding individual souls. Take that central picture of Christian teaching, the Good Shepherd. Set it down in the tangled network of life today and try honestly to follow it out, and see how short a distance can be traveled before it becomes clear that one life cannot be adequately ministered to without facing and dealing with great social forces. To be specific: dip down into almost any typical parish and follow one week's work of a faithful pastor. Here is a routine item, for instance: the pastor's applying to a social agency for the prevention of tuberculosis for milk and eggs for a consumptive patient. Follow it out a few yards beyond the immediate milk and eggs. It is common to regard tuberculosis as a scourge. But it is also a common occupational disease. It is bred in dark rooms of slum tenements, those monstrous monuments of profit-making, mausoleums in which men, women, and children are buried alive. If the pastor is to be anything more than an almoner of milk and eggs, if he is to do anything more than read the twenty-third psalm to a man coughing his life away, he must face the cause of tuberculosis in an accepted way of life which places profits above public health. He must do what Saint Paul described as the Christian vocation, "struggle with the master spirits of this dark world." The next pastoral call is in a home where the tensions resulting from unemployment have reached the breaking point. That sapping of the spiritual foundations of homes is one of the less obvious and tangible results of economic breakdown,

but it is one of the most disastrous. That disaster is clearly put in an aching little verse by Lucia Trent:

"He has been out of work these many weeks.
She reads the ads and very seldom speaks.
So day by day within this rented tomb
They bark their shins against the edge of doom."[10]

The cause of the "barked shins" does not lie within the four walls of the home. The salvation of multitudes of homes from similar disintegrating tensions must be won in the larger field of economic security. The same week may well see other acute needs, the case of juvenile delinquency; the material and other problems in a home where the father was killed in the Great War; the moral problem of a young man or woman in love and unable to marry or see any prospect of being able to marry.

For such constantly recurring situations there is a deep suggestiveness in the description of Jesus given in the Gospel of John. "Having loved his own . . . he loved them unto the end." If love for the individual is to be effective, it must be love unto the end, a love which follows him clear down through the ramifying roads of life in a complex industrialized world; the defending love of a shepherd which discerns the real enemies which prey, and, like the Good Shepherd, is willing to lay down his life for the sheep. To refuse to go through to the end is to become a hireling shepherd. A minister who spent

[10] Lucia Trent, *Connecticut Poets.* Henry Harrison, New York, 1932. Reprinted by permission.

a number of years in a factory town, in which nearly all of his congregation were employed in or dependent on a manufacturing plant which was a unit in a great corporation, found that the spiritual as well as the material life of his people was largely conditioned by that factory. He felt a sense of frustration and futility in his work, as though he were training boys and girls up through the Church school, and then leading them to the factory door and saying "Good-by," sending them into a realm where he was powerless, but which was powerful to shape them, body, mind, and soul. He came to see that if he were a faithful shepherd, he would have to go beyond the factory door. James Whitcomb Riley wrote a very sentimental poem, which brought tears to the eyes of past generations, in which an old father took leave of a son going to war with the words "Good-by, Jim, take care of yourself!" Futile advice, though a natural injunction, sending a boy to face the cannon and pleading with him to "take care of himself." A grand opportunity the boys mowed down in the shambles at Shiloh and the Wilderness had to "take care of themselves"! It is just as sufficient wisdom to send boys and girls into the grim battles of the present industrial world with a cheery "Take care of yourselves" on our lips. There is need for a faith that brings the resources of God into play in the world, that brings fresh meaning into an old reassurance, "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

## Chapter V

# SOCIAL SALVATION IN RELIGIOUS TERMS

RELIGIOUS terms are the only ones in which so definitely religious an end as social salvation can be adequately conceived. Any rearrangement of economic furniture, and structural change in society can be described in strictly economic and political language. But an order of life to which the word "salvation" can be applied which includes inner revolution as well as outward transfer of power needs the length and breadth and depth and height of a distinctly religious vocabulary. Its goal, its motive force, its spirit are religious in origin and quality and can be comprehended and expressed only in their native tongue.

The religious approach to social transformation can well be examined in the light of two very contradictory statements. They are both picturesque and paradoxical; they are both true, and despite their apparent clash, are different sides of the same shield. They are both from the field of literary criticism. The first is a statement in a recent article in the *Liverpool Post,* that "no literature, whether poetry or prose, has ever appealed to generations outside that in which it was written, whose author failed to give the impression that his reach included the pit of Orcus and the further side of the moon." The

other is the provocative statement of George Bernard Shaw to the effect that "nothing has survived as literature which was not first written as journalism." By which he means that the work which survived was not written with an eye on posterity but created for a contemporary audience, in terms of the life and experience of the generation from which it came. Both these conditions for permanence in literature have a suggestive bearing on the vastly different theme of religion in social redemption. Any conception of social salvation or strategy for it, which is not to be fragmentary and superficial, must include in its reach the pit of hell and "the further side of the moon." It must descend to the depths of human nature and reach to the heights of God. It must have the echo of

> "older seas
> That beat on vaster shores."

Its mind must have cosmic dimension. Religion to be valid and vital in such functioning must also have what Shaw means by journalistic quality, that is, have pertinent relationships to the life and needs of the generation in which it operates.

If social salvation is to be preached, as it must be, that preaching must be done in the terms of religion, of the nature and will of God. There is only one theme fit for a Christian pulpit, the "good news" of God in Christ. That good news may have a very sharp and definite focus on a very specific point in life, but if it is not good news of God, it is not Chris-

tian preaching. Unless the social implications of the Christian revelation are presented so that they carry genuine overtones of the nature of God, they will be fatally lacking in depth. Lacking that theological depth, many such presentations are more marked by vehement but curiously unproductive exhortation and denunciation than by assurance and authority. John Buchan, in his life of Oliver Cromwell, says that after the execution of Charles I, Cromwell's spiritual life coarsened, and "his piety became more declamatory and flamboyant and lost the old assurance and the old tenderness." That statement is an absolutely perfect description, in its adjectives, of the sin that doth so easily beset social preaching which is not religious in its source and goal. It becomes "declamatory and flamboyant," and lacking in those basic essentials of Christian faith, assurance, and tenderness. It must be remembered that if there has been frequent failure to preach the gospel in a way that reaches beyond personal morals and the safe areas of individual life, there has also been failure to preach the social responsibility of the Christian faith as an evangel.

A second necessity for presenting social salvation in religious terms lies in the fact that religious language is the only kind with which the majority in the congregations are familiar. It is strange that this elementary fact should be forgotten. An ecclesiastical injunction, which was the fruit of the Protestant Reformation in England, directed that preaching be done in a language "understanded" by the people.

That precept has a timeless pertinence. When an abrupt substitution of an economic vocabulary is made for the accustomed diction of religion, the new tongue is not easily "understanded." One can have a good deal of sympathy for congregations straining their ears and minds trying to take in what seems like a strange jargon of many radically-minded preachers. The congregations might well say, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?" They might repeat with Festus: "Thou art beside thyself. Much learning hath made thee mad."

A few years ago a young minister in New England was dismissed from a church and the incident was widely heralded as a martyrdom to preaching the social gospel. But those who knew the man and had heard him preach were not quite so sure. Some had the distinct feeling that had such thoroughgoing Socialists as Norman Thomas, Kirby Page, and Jerome Davis been on the pulpit committee of that church, they would still have had emphatic questions to raise about the man's preaching. It was not so much a case of the minister's doing social preaching as that he was not preaching at all. Undigested chunks of Karl Marx and Scott Nearing, garnished with an occasional page of the *Nation* or *New Republic,* hardly come under the head of Christian preaching.

## I

There is a close parallel to religion in the discussion of the weakness of Socialist propaganda in the

United States by Professor Harold D. Lasswell in his *World Politics and Personal Insecurity*. He says that Socialism badly needs a new set of symbols. It speaks in terms of symbols which are strange and remote to the thinking of most Americans. The technical language of Marxianism, such phrases as "exploitation," "class war," "surplus value," are an overseas tongue. Such symbols had small chance to compete with our already successful symbol words, such as "individualism," "captains of industry." He says that any radical movement should have based itself on symbols which are part of the mental and spiritual world of Americans; instead of talking about surplus value of labor, for instance, it should have advocated "guaranteed income for all who work."[1] Whatever this may lack as an explanation of the difficulties of a Socialist movement in America in overcoming a foreign, European quality in the minds of the vast majority, it at least pictures a very real obstacle. It also has its suggestions for the realm of religion. If the whole undertaking of making genuine changes in an economic system is to be recognized by any large group within the churches as being a part of religion, and a responsibility of Christianity, it must be presented in association with the accepted symbols of the religion. Such a presentation brings into the field of Christian evangelization the principle of military strategy which Captain H. B. Lidell Hart has so emphasized—the wisdom of

[1] Harold D. Lasswell, *World Politics and Personal Insecurity*. Whittlesey House, New York, 1935.

"indirect approach on the line of least expectation."

All too often preaching on the subject of social change has been merely a matter of the preacher's "getting something off his chest." That is usually an exhilarating experience and the stimulation of it often goes to the head with an intoxication like whisky. But it is never preaching. It is well to compare that "getting something off the chest" to the far different experience of Bunyan's Pilgrim at the foot of the cross. There Christian got something off his back—his burden of sin. In that sense there is all the difference in the world between getting something off the chest and off the back. In this whole field of religion in social action the end sought is to be freed from the burden of shared communal sin and evil which we now bear. What is called for is not the exhilaration of denunciation, or the dramatic gesture of martyrdom, but the patience and resourcefulness of a consecrated teacher in getting people to see and feel the religious values and religious necessity of economic and social change which will contribute to definitely Christian ends.

To accomplish that great end the eternal symbols of religion and its absolutes must be set in a newly seen relationship to the whole complex of conditions which determine the shape and quality of human experience today. The historic Christian faith must have new growing points reaching out into new areas of soil. Isidor Schneider uses an extended figure of speech which pictures the need. Speaking of love, he writes:

"If it has destiny, it is like a potted tree,
that as it grows must break the pot,
and if it reach not more abundant earth, must die.
My love has cracked its pot; but has struck
the more abundant earth; the earth of comradeship,
and I can, all my length grow out,
in revolutionary act."[2]

The Christian religion must break the pot, escape from crippling confines which have shut it in to an unnatural imprisonment, and "strike the more abundant earth" of the whole of men's relationship in society, and "all its length grow out in revolutionary act." Such a growing its length out is necessary for its own survival as a vital force, for Christianity is not a fixed and definite thing to be kept intact like a family heirloom. It is, rather, an act, an experience, which must be continually renewed.

Let us look, then, at historic Christian doctrine, very briefly and with lamentable sketchiness, for some suggestions toward thinking of social salvation in terms of Christian faith. In doing so we do not take the compulsions of faith as supplying details of action in complex situations. One of the finest tributes ever paid to a teacher was that of a student who said of him, "He flung down a bunch of keys." That is what a great teacher does. He does not furnish charts for every contingency, to take the place of initiative and responsibility. He does not defeat the adventure of life with a smoothing code of par-

[2] Isidor Schneider, *Comrade Mister: Poems.* The Equinox Cooperative Press, Inc., New York, 1935.

ticular rules to be followed like an automaton. He flings down a bunch of keys—insights, principles, a spirit, which unlock the doors of life. That is what Jesus did. His words are keys to be picked up and used to open large rooms of experience.

## II

Take first the central truth of Christian faith, Jesus' revelation of God. That is a key which throws open many doors into the ramifying rooms of life. No one can ever hope to capture in words even a part of the meaning for human society of the nature of the Christian God. Every discussion of God ought to begin and end with the recognition expressed in Henry van Dyke's hymn:

> "Thy sea is great,
> Our boats are small."

One indispensable prelude to any fruitful preaching about God is to banish the apologetic note. If the sin of some former generations has been a too omniscient and dogmatic shout about God, the sin of ours has been a too inaudible whisper. Many of the Lord's musicians have played skillfully on a muted ukulele. The range and volume of that instrument are not sufficient to carry the great music of a Hallelujah Chorus, "He shall reign forever and ever."

It has been pertinently said that religion begins with a new dawn and ends with its back to the wall. Too many backs have been up against a wall.

The hesitant, apologizing mood has made disastrous subtractions from the convincing quality of a proclamation of God. This is evident in two phrases which have been vastly overused. One is "By your leave." We teach thus: "May I suggest, if you will kindly allow me, that there may possibly be something in the idea of God worth considering. Of course there is nothing final about it, and it may have to be revised after the next meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Science, but in the meantime it may prove interesting material for a discussion." Who will say that a great deal of that perfectly good-mannered and perfectly futile tone has not been often heard? The other word we overwork is "Please." "Please believe in God," we say. "Please do this. Please be good. It won't hurt you nearly as much as you think and may possibly be quite worth while." Any considerable listening to such an apologetic tone brings a fresh sympathy with the exclamation of George Whitefield, "I love those that thunder the law."

What must be carried in to the mind and heart with the authority of thunder, is the realization that the effort to strike off the fetters which bind life, and to secure an order of life into the structure of which justice and love are built, is grounded in the Christian God. The goal of the effort is determined by the character of God. At the Writer's International Congress for the Defense of Culture, held in Paris in the spring of 1935, one word most often used was "humanism." But the definition of that word given

was "a preoccupation with living and suffering men, and a hostility toward the abstractions and institutions now weighing them down." Those words could as well be used as a definition of a vital part of Christian theism. What words could serve as a more accurate expression of the central truth of Jesus' parable of the Great Supper in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew? One who worships the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in spirit and in truth is impelled to "a preoccupation with living and suffering men," and to a hostility toward all that weighs them down. All the facts of human suffering are not only facts to which God is related, but are ultimately facts about God.

This is not a novel doctrine but a recovery of an old experience. A study of the book of Acts and other records of early Christian history shows that the belief held by the Christians about the God who encompassed the life of man threw a light on the relations of men within that life which set them in a new perspective and gave them a new value in their design for living.

William the Conqueror, king of England, had a violent temper and a marvelous gift for profanity. He had one oath which he called his "irresistible oath." He used it only a very few times in his whole life, but whenever he swore it the earth shook. It was this: *"By the Splendor of God!"*

William the Conqueror has been dead a long time. But his "irresistible oath" deserves to live forever. It is a truly divine affirmation on the lips of a

Church determined to be satisfied with nothing less than a Christlike world.

That oath, "By the Splendor of God!" expresses both the motive and the goal of the endeavor of the Church.

The splendor of God, revealed in Christ, is the motive power.

To bring out the imprisoned splendor of God in man, often so cruelly deformed by the claws of greed; the splendor of his image in young children, so often marred by the pitiless exploitation of our profit-driven world; the splendor of God in a possible brotherhood instead of the collective suicide of war —these are the goals. When the splendor of God is fully seen, it becomes an imperative, an undebatable "must" propelling life into action. For a church, as for an individual, it is a redeeming imperative. When life gets into the imperative mood, it is lifted out of meaningless merry-go-rounds, out of the paralysis of indecision, out of bondage to crippling fears. Lasting propulsion into the struggle for a Christian world comes from a vision of the splendor of God, to be reflected in the life of man. Such a vision brings an old imperative to the heart and lips, "He must reign until he hath put his enemies under his feet."

But at present many who worship this God acknowledge an imperative of a far different sort. The English artist, Will Dysart, has made an etching with a bitter thrust to it. At first sight it seems irreverent, even blasphemous. It represents Jehovah,

drawn in the traditional manner of an old man, seated beside a standing figure of Jesus. Jehovah is saying to Jesus, "We are powerless, my Son, the banks have spoken." The artist, however, is not irreverent. The etching is deeply religious. It is a satire on the essential atheism of the idea that the banks should have the last word on human life. The irony of the picture lies in the fact that the words quoted would be limply accepted by multitudes within the churches as final and complete. If the banks give the verdict that millions must remain in misery, that injustice must continue, that profits precede persons in every question concerning business, that ends the matter. Even God, not being a banker, is powerless. To genuine Christian faith, however, the last word is God's. It is, "God has spoken through Jesus Christ," and by that creative word a new world may be built.

## III

A movement for change definite and far-reaching enough to deserve the name "social salvation," finds its greatest persuasive power in terms of the personality and teaching of Jesus. That persuasion loses power so often because Jesus is not so much a living force as an historic portrait hanging on an old first-century wall. It is very easy for people, both ministers and laymen, to play, all unconsciously, the rôle of Joseph of Arimathaea. It was the tragic destiny of Joseph to honor and do reverence to a dead Jesus rather than stand by and serve a living

Lord. The most lavish pulpit tributes to Jesus may be so remote from strategic points of life's struggle that they may be just wreaths laid on the tomb of a dead Christ.

This persuasion in terms of Jesus does not mean that he is to be pressed into the service of a formula or project originally conceived without reference to him. Such an attempt to seize forcibly the prestige of Jesus, for the sake of the use that can be made of him in getting something carried through, is frequent enough, and is always a form of immoral violence. The Christian attitude to Jesus is expressed in memorable words by Humbert Wolfe, the English poet, in writing about fiction. "To tell a story," he says, "you must not invent the incidents. You must liberate the characters into their own incident." To liberate Jesus into his own incidents in this twentieth century—that is the high task of a Christian Church in its worship, its preaching, its life, its action. If truly liberated, he will find his own incidents, his own warfare against all which binds his brothers, the incarnation of his spirit in laws and institutions. Such possible liberation into definite incident, in terms of our civilization, depends on the sharpness and clarity of our understanding of him, and what the implications of acknowledging him as Lord mean. The power for social transformation which lies in an unhindered understanding of Jesus is expressed in the classic words of Professor Alfred N. Whitehead: "The impracticable ethics of Jesus endowed mankind with its most precious

instrument of progress." A vivid historical picture of that "precious instrument of progress," in the teachings of Jesus, is found in the life of Harriet Beecher Stowe. One Sunday morning in 1851 she took part in a communion service in the little church in Brunswick, Maine, of which her husband was pastor, a service at which she was deeply moved. Going home from church the idea of writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* took definite form, and that afternoon she began the story, writing first the scene of the death of Uncle Tom. That dramatic symbolism of the Lord's Supper furnished a new frame of reference for a whole field of human need. The social evil of slavery was set in the light of the nature and will of God, as revealed in Jesus. It is only the soberest historical judgment that that little communion service attended by a few people was one of the most important events in the whole tumultuous decade of 1850-1860.

The significance of Jesus for the world of economics and politics is becoming increasingly clear along another line. That significance lies in the astounding fact that the most thoroughly Christian procedure or action in a political or economic problem is also the most realistic facing and meeting of the situation when set in a long-time frame. That is an immense claim, but can be documented with an impressive mass of specific cases. Take just two instances, for example. One is the Peace of Versailles. Recall the sneer of Clemenceau about President Wilson at Paris, "He spoke like Jesus Christ."

We can see the curl of scorn on the old pagan face of Clemenceau as he said it. But about that sneer Gerald Heard, the English historian, exclaims with deep insight, "Ah, if he only *had!*" If everyone at the Versailles conference of alleged Christian governments had spoken like Jesus Christ, Europe and the world would not be poised today on the brink of hell! We can see more clearly than ever before in history that it is not Jesus who is a sentimentalist. It is the blind believers in *realpolitik*. The years which have followed the Versailles conference have proved to the hilt that, as a basis of security, Jesus is the hardest bit of economic and political realism ever injected into the world's thinking. Because politicians would not think in terms of Jesus' valuations, millions of lives will probably pay the price.

The other example—that of the Christian politician and statesman, George Lansbury, who resigned the chairmanship of the British Labor party when he could not support the application of sanctions against Italy by the League of Nations at the beginning of the Italian war on Ethiopia. Lansbury received severe censure, much of it mixed with contempt, as an impractical "idealist." He was firmly against anything that might lead to war as being opposed to Christian teaching. Yet he spoke the one thoroughly realistic word which had been uttered in the whole discussion. He held that true world peace involved bringing up honestly the whole question of the allocation of raw materials, and that true world peace depends on an economic reorganization

of the present divisions of the earth between the contented nations which "have" and the discontented ones which "have not." It is not Lansbury who is the sentimentalist. The note of economic and political realism is struck only when Christian ethics are brought up on the table.

## IV

Again, a Christian view of man will bring a strong momentum to social action. Such a view of man has nothing in common with that idyllic conception of Rousseau. It has nothing in common with the romantic idealization of society with which Comte undertook to replace theism. The Christian view, as it comes from Jesus, has no illusions about man's condition or about his evil. It does have a profound sense of his potential capacities and his worth as a child of God. That rating is found in one of the most profoundly theological chapters in the Bible, the fifteenth chapter of Luke, in which the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost boy portray the divine concern for the individual. An acceptance of Jesus' view of man, of the divine worth of personality, will compel action toward the reorganization of a society which denies that worth, and thwarts its practical application, as so much of our present economic system does. Such a view of man will issue in a deep-rooted indignation against the human devastation which results from the denial of Jesus' appraisal of man. Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" seems as perfect an ex-

pression of volcanic indignation over wanton blight and ruin as has ever been made:

"So, on I went. I think I never saw
Such starved, ignoble nature; nothing throve:
. . . What made those holes and rents
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to balk
All hope of greenness? 'Tis a brute must walk,
Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents."

When Childe Roland finally comes upon the Monster who has brought devastation on land and man, "Dauntless the slug horn to my lips I set, and blew." The slug horn of a stirred anger at the waste brought about by the use of human beings as mere instruments and things is a much needed musical instrument. A recent illustration of its moving power is to be found in the indignation at the desolation wrought by profit-making in the industrial North of England, voiced by J. B. Priestly in his *English Journey*. Dauntless the slug horn to his lips he sets and blows:

Nineteenth-century industrialism found a green and pleasant land and had left a wilderness of dirty bricks. It blackened fields, poisoned rivers, ravaged the earth, and sowed filth and ugliness with a lavish hand. (You cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs, and you cannot become rich by selling the world your coal and iron and cotton goods and chemicals without some dirt and disorder. So much is admitted. But there are far too many eggshells and too few omelettes about this nineteenth-century England. What you see looks like a debauchery of cynical greed. Who gave them leave to turn this island into their ashpit? They may or may not

have left us their muck. If every penny of that money had been spent on England herself, the balance would still be miles on the wrong side.) It is as if the country had devoted a hundred years of its life to keeping gigantic sooty pigs. And the people who were choked by the reek of the sties did not get the bacon. The more I thought about it, the more this period of England's industrial supremacy began to look like a gigantic dirty trick. . . . At one end of this commercial greatness were a lot of half-starved, bleary-eyed children crawling about among machinery.[3]

That is a specifically Christian outlook.

The atheism which sets things above men finds another sharp picturing in another recent English book of a very different sort, Lloyd George's *War Memoirs*. On one occasion, during a staff conference following some of the worst slaughter early in the war, Lord Kitchener seemed particularly crushed. He walked up and down the room exclaiming, "Oh, it's terrible, terrible." On being offered some sympathy over the loss of life, he showed irritation and cried out, "Oh, I'm not thinking of casualties. I'm thinking of the loss of shells." Things were more important than men. It was a perfectly natural expression of the twisted values which are an inevitable result of a profit-based way of life.

We have plenty bird's-eye views of men in which they seem such impersonal midges in a distant landscape that it is of minor importance what happens to them. We need a God's-eye view of man.

[3] J. B. Priestly, *English Journey*. Harper & Brothers, New York, 1934. Reprinted by permission.

## V

Inseparable from a doctrine of man is a doctrine of sin. The Christian conception of sin has at its heart a grasp of the truth of social solidarity which, if clearly made explicit, brings a strong impulsion to social action.

Kipling's memorable lines,

> "The sin that ye do by two and two
> Ye pay for one by one,"

express some of the relationship between individual guilt and social sin, but they need to be extended in their range. The sin that we do by two and two, by ten and ten, by thousand and thousand, by million and million—of that communal sin we all share the guilt. The doctrine of sin must be explored through all the ramifications of a mechanized society if the prerequisite of any real salvation, repentance, is to be brought about. The conviction of sin, if the idea of sin is to be imprisoned within the limits of conscious individual transgression, can never result in the social repentance so essential to a Christian order of life.

Consider what a baffling complexity the intricate social network of life has brought into the whole subject of sin. As an aid to the imagination, consider the difference between such a typical sinner of the premachine age as Dick Turpin, the highwayman of legend and history, and a counterpart of today. It was easy to recognize the highwayman as a sinner. The case was beautifully simple—stark

black against white. But who can recognize, much less apprehend, the modern Dick Turpin? Even the question in the preceding sentence would furnish grounds for a libel suit, if any individual were suggested as a sample of the highwayman in a machine age setting. He does not recognize himself. He rides no horse, he carries no gun. He is as gentle as any cooing dove. Yet in thousands of cases he lays a highwayman's tax on every kitchen in the land, on the shops of a thousand industries, using the polite mechanisms of the industrial and political complexities of a power and mass-production age. The agents of this tax are often the ultrarespectable United States revenue collectors, working in the line of patriotic duty. Perhaps it is a monopoly on some natural resources, such as power, steel, iron, or aluminum, which enables some individual or group to gouge hundreds of millions of dollars, under the forms of law, from helpless economic vassals. And just as Dick Turpin is said to have shared his plunderings with the poor, so the modern grandees of the Turpin Utilities Company or the Turpin Manufacturing Co., Ltd., with a generous mood and gesture, fling dividends to public enterprises rendering real service, sometimes to Turpin University or Saint Richard's Church.

That single contrast, admittedly oversimplified, throws some light on one of the specific aspects of sin in a complicated economic network today. No concentration on the specific conditions of a so-called machine age should blind us to the truth that in

many vital essentials sin is the same in any age, agricultural or industrial. One of the most subtle illusions any age faces is the belief that when men change their clothes and tools, human nature and all the central problems of life undergo a corresponding change. Only a person who renounces history entirely can forget that many pivotal points in morals were exactly the same under the stars of the Arabian desert as under the smokestacks of Detroit. The exploitation of labor in the building of pyramids, the covetousness of the Bethel of Amos's day, the whole issue of the placing of self-will and selfishness above the claims of love and duty—these are the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Yet, when all that is admitted, the smokestacks of Detroit furnish a background and setting which so profoundly complicates and obscures moral questions as to place a heavy obligation for more acute and penetrating ethical insight and realistic thinking on the part of those who seek to furnish moral and religious guidance. Skipping entirely the vexed and difficult questions involved in seeking a definition of sin which has meaning for the thinking of our day—which thinking is done so largely in evolutionary and sociological patterns—let us arbitrarily take as our idea of sin, as Christians, disharmony with the moral nature and purpose of God, as revealed in Jesus. With such an idea of sin as our guide, certain obvious necessities which a machine age makes for rethinking the whole question of ethical conduct readily appear.

A machine age enormously multiplies the possibilities of injury to persons; it depersonalizes human relations; it increases the social character of guilt while it obscures individual responsibility; it casts a cloak of respectability on deadly social sins; it provides a network of relations in which injustice is built into the whole structure, and for which no one is solely or even largely responsible, and which is difficult either to see or eradicate; finally, it makes the mood of repentance, so essential to moral progress, a very difficult one to induce, just because social repentance is needed.

Just as a machine age is one of large-scale production—it holds the possibility of large-scale injury to human life. We think of the cruel conquerors of history, such as Attila, as the dramatic devastators of life. They are, in fact, gentle children, as far as widespread blight on life is concerned, compared with the far-reaching possibilities for hurt in the hands of many God-fearing, churchgoing bondholders of today. The lust for profits, when incorporated and equipped with long claws which reach across continents, can blight and mangle life on a scale utterly impossible before the industrial revolution. A group of directors, chatting amiably over a conference table, can adopt what is called, euphemistically, an "adjustment to market conditions," and utterly change the whole face of life for hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children; can send starvation and death abroad through a whole state, or even nation. Here is a gentle lady, deeply interested in foreign mission-

ary work, a bulwark in a city church, calmly drawing seventeen per cent on the common stock of a textile concern of which she is chief owner, while the concern is paying less than starvation wages to its workers. Every dollar she gives to missions is marked with blood. Catherine de' Medici did not match her in dark power over human life. This machine age multiplication of the power of evil, of course, found its most convincing demonstration in the Great War and the breakdown which followed.

The impersonal character of human relations is one of the greatest ethical liabilities of a machine age. Results of action are remote from causes. The face-to-face relationship, so great a force in keeping conduct on a decent moral level, all through history, has largely disappeared. The men "on the belt" in a great factory become parts of an impersonal process of production. We do not see how the profits on our investments in stocks and bonds are made. Responsibility and the opportunity for the working of conscience varies inversely as the square of the distance by which we are separated from the effects of our acts.

There is a prayer in the Psalms, "Absolve me from my faults unknown" (Moffatt). How fitting this petition for our age, when the most tragic evils of our time are due to entrenched social immoralities, tolerated and upheld by social custom and opinion, in which men share but which bring no sense of individual guilt. "Hang the Kaiser" was a popular shout in the war years, on the Allied side of the line.

But how few of us feel deeply our own guilt as well as the guilt of the Kaiser in so far as our attitudes and opinions, added to those of millions of others, made war inevitable? One of the worst complications of the problem of sin in a machine age is the transference of guilt from ourselves to others. This pressing home of the sense of guilt demands keener ethical perceptions than does the securing of an admission of guilt for wrong of individual drunkenness. The test of our moral adequacy is whether we can feel guilt for participation in profits which involve injustice of exploitation, guilt for militaristic attitudes and racial attitudes which are social sins.

Ethical sensitiveness is needed to remove the cloak of respectability which inevitably covers the most glaring social wrongs of a machine age. The whole sanctification of the profit motive is such a cloak which baffles moral realism. The lust for money has been baptized again and again at the altars of the Church. When an order in industry has the worshipful sanction of millions of people, it is exceedingly difficult to see or get others to see that it may be an expression of all that Jesus opposed. Yet if religion does not develop such eyesight and insight on the part of its adherents, it is merely a pious decoration on a temple of antichrist, and not transforming leaven.

## VI

Consider another affirmation of the Christian faith —eternal life. Is not one great reason for the slack-

ening hold which faith in immortality has on multitudes even within the churches due to the lack of sustaining roots of that faith in practical action? There are literally measureless implications in the faith in eternal life which are not commonly followed out. No doctrine can live in the intellect which does not renew itself in experience. That is a law of the spiritual life as irrevocable as gravitation in the physical. If the implications of immortality were made the guide for individual and social practice, that very experience would give a reality to the faith itself which centuries of argument could not give, indeed, have not given.

What we are willing to do for the sake of men depends ultimately on our conception of what they actually are. If we put on them the rating of immortal souls, that act of faith brings a new and powerful momentum into action on their behalf. Take a familiar sight in China as an example, a child worker in a mill, ten years of age, fallen asleep at a machine and mangled to death. What *is* she? Just one of four hundred million *things* in China, things which are very useful in producing from one hundred to five hundred per cent profit, things easily replaced when damaged or destroyed? Or is she a child of God, endowed with an eternal worth? It makes a difference. But we do not have to go to China for examples. We can ask the same question concerning share croppers in Arkansas and Alabama, miners in West Virginia, or derelicts waiting for nothing everywhere. The immortal hope is one sure starting

point from which to move toward a co-operative world.

## VII

The central symbol of Christianity is the cross. Of that symbol man can truly say,

> ". . . *if* I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is."

If those who accept the cross as a symbol would give it the dedicated gaze described in Tennyson's words, it would not only give a new frontage to life but also a new impelling push. The cross is not first something to imitate, but a world view to receive. The cross, first of all, is a window into reality. Those who through the centuries have looked longest and most deeply at it have found more than meets the eye. They have seen it as more than a tragedy, more than a martyrdom, more than something loosely and vaguely called an inspiration. They have been persuaded that they have looked through an open window, have found a clue to an ultimate fact in their world. The cross symbolizes a hard world in which good could be crucified, but in which love through the acceptance of evil could rise above evil and overcome it. The cross is not merely something planted by men on the surface of the earth, but something thrown up from the ultimate reality of God.

But while the cross is more than example, a dedicated gaze will reveal it as a compelled way of life.

A dramatic critic, writing of the film made out of a play of Somerset Maugham's, says that in the transfer from stage to screen, "the central situation, and hence, its meaning and significance, was lost." How often has "the central situation" of Christianity, the cross, been lost!—and with that loss has gone the meaning and significance. That central situation is love confronting a world of evil, not counting its life dear to itself, giving its life a ransom for many. How easily that is lost! There are so many other notable and interesting things to take its place. The great liability of an individual or a church is well expressed in the last words of Lady Mary Worthy Montague—"It has all been very interesting." Compare those with the words of Jesus on the cross—"It is finished." It is not merely the contrast between the words of an ordinary mortal and Jesus. It is a contrast between two frontages toward life and evil. The liability is that we can come to the end of a life, even to the end of a life of ministry in the name of Christ, and say merely, "It has all been very interesting." Here an idea, there an absorbing movement, here an interesting theological speculation, always the pleasure of self-expression, but no costly dedication to a cause, no cross, which would enable one to say, "It is finished."

The salvation needed is one which leads out of an "interesting" life into a fellowship of his sufferings. The crucial need, using the word "crucial" in its root meaning of involving a cross, is put with fine imagination in a recent fictional story of *Jesus* by a

French Jew—Edmund Fleg.[4] It is supposed to be a story of Jesus told by the man who became the wandering Jew, of immortal legend. The author, by a device legitimate in fiction, represents the teller of the story as a man who had been healed of paralysis by Jesus, but who refuses to help him carry his cross on his way to Calvary. All fiction, of course, but what a wide area of life it covers, both through the centuries and today! The man who has received, and with gratitude, gifts of personal soundness, wholeness, from Jesus, but who refuses to go with him as he moves out to sacrificial service in a world of evil—his name is legion.

The cross, if it be more than a refined plaything, cannot be confined to an altar. All the things of common life must be stamped with it.

There is no more deeply moving symbol of this truth than that lowly survival of European folkways, the hot-cross bun.

It was a quaint and striking custom, originated in the folk observances of religion long ago, when religion was more closely tied to the homely things of daily life, to mark a little piece of bread with the sign of the cross.

But what an eloquent witness to the truth that all bread ought to be sacramental, marked with the divine sign of brotherhood!

Bread has been marked with many things. It has been marked with tears.

[4] Edmund Fleg, *Jesus*. E. P. Dutton and Co., New York, 1935.

"O God, that bread should be so dear,
And flesh and blood so cheap!"

Bread has been marked with blood; so much of the vast process of bread-winning and bread-eating has been at the cost of human suffering and life. That tragic history is put into one striking and searching line in Archibald MacLeish's recent poem, "Panic": "Forgive us this day our daily bread." So much of our breadwinning in this complicated world needs forgiveness!

But here on the Lenten breakfast table is the sign of a more excellent way—bread with a cross on it, bread with the sign of love stamped on it.

All bread should be marked with brotherhood. All bread should be holy. That is, all the processes of making our daily bread, should be the expression of a brotherhood in Christ—bread won, not by the overreaching of others, but by the action of love set in the very structure and machinery of our common life.

The cross on a bit of bread is a pledge of the undefeated love of God, who will bring in his kingdom of love. It is also a divine persuasion to bring all the ways of making a living under the sign of love.

## VIII

Finally, there is the Church, part of the Christian faith, a means of social salvation to be interpreted in far more definitely religious terms than it frequently receives. What an august and overwhelm-

ing descriptive phrase for the Church, used in the New Testament, "the body of Christ"! It is a living body by which his mind and spirit are given hands and fingers to lay hold on life and mold it to his heart's desire. If a church is to be that, it needs a heightened view of itself as a divine institution. It has been living too much in the shadow of an organizational conception. Consider, for instance, the inadequacy of such a definition of a church as that of John Locke: "A church I take to be a voluntary association of men, joining themselves together of their own accord to the public worship of God, in such a manner as they judge acceptable to him, and effectual to the salvation of their own souls."[5] There are many who would not see anything radically wrong with that definition. But look at it. Where is the "body of Christ"? Buried in some unknown tomb. No divine dimension, no consciousness of the church as a creation of God, in which his life resides.

From a heightened view of the church, "high church" in a profound and vital sense, will come a fresh sense of mission and dedication. The real danger of today is not so much that of a renegade church or a cowardly church. It is the far more subtle and insidious danger of a preoccupied church. There is a story of the Russian writer, Andreev, which deserves to be included in the service book of every church in Christendom. In that story the events of the crucifixion are seen through the eyes of Ben-

[5] Quoted by J. M. Mecklin in *The Story of American Dissent.* Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1935.

Tovit, who on the day of the cross grasped clearly only one thing, that he was suffering from a toothache. His attention had fleeting glimpses of the tragic progress along the Via Dolorosa, a flash now and then of a figure on a hill outlined against the sky. But that was all. He was preoccupied with his own immediate concern. A preoccupied church! Shall it view the crucifixion of Jesus in our modern world, merely as a bystander, with attention distracted by what have come to be its own more commanding and immediate affairs?

Set against this possibility of a preoccupied church another picture from literature. In Ibsen's play, *Brand,* there is an unforgettable figure of a fanatical Norwegian preacher obsessed by the glamour of one idea—to build a "church big enough for God."

Men have often built churches according to other specifications. They have desired to build churches big enough for the congregations. Sometimes that is not very hard to do. Men have often tried to build a church big enough to advertise the wealth of the membership, or its social prestige. Or they have been contented to build one big enough to be the biggest in the city. Those are all pitiably *small* churches.

But a church big enough for God—that would have to be a *big* church! Floor space would have little to do with it. A church with the acreage of Saint Peter's in Rome might well be too small for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, on the other hand, we know that a small upper room in

Jerusalem at Pentecost was quite big enough for God to come into it.

"Big enough for God" calls for a church big enough in the horizon of its mind and the passion of its heart, for his whole divine color scheme—black, brown, white, yellow, and red; big enough for the whole world for which Christ died; not a malformed, dwarf church, content to stay in the little backyard of one picket-fenced nation; big enough to hold in its heart the dream of a kingdom of God on earth, a society into whose very structure love shall be built.

How much will such a church cost?

Are we willing to pay the price?

## Chapter VI

# OBSTACLES TO A REVOLUTIONARY CHRISTIANITY

AMONG the many pleas of Jesus for realistic thinking are the two parables of counting the cost, that of the king who made war without knowing how large was the army against him, and the man who started to build a tower without knowing how big the job was. Jesus talked much of the assets of the life of the spirit; he also talked much of the liabilities. He warned again and again against a jaunty setting out on an enterprise with only an equipment of hope and ignorance. His discourses to his disciples on the onslaughts which would be made upon them might be called pessimistic. They were not pessimistic at all. They were just realistic, the product of a keen eye and an honest mind. A clear-eyed scrutiny of the forces to be overcome is a positive resource for overcoming them. Without such an appraisal there is little prospect of meeting the opposing forces successfully.

The whole subject of the prospect of the Christian churches becoming an active effective force in transforming the economic basis of society, calls for a fair look at the obstacles in the way. Particularly is this necessary in the field where such obstacles are liable to be overlooked or underestimated, that is, within

the Church itself. There are great mountains to be moved by faith, hindrances in the inherited traditions of thinking, and of preaching, in outlooks and conceptions often tied up with the most deeply cherished things of faith. In this chapter the attempt is made to explore briefly some of these obstacles within the Christian tradition and organization. Such exploration is important for three reasons. The first is the importance of a map of a battlefield to a soldier—to show where the fighting will be. Much of the most difficult effort will be within the Church rather than without, with that mental conditioning and inertia which prevent orientation toward social action. A second reason is that when those who have a strong desire to bring about social change have lacked a clear understanding of the back-pulling power of mental habits and well-established traditions, the result has been disappointment and disillusion. A third reason, equally important, is that the mental qualities necessary to such a realistic scrutiny of the obstacles are just the qualities very useful and, indeed, necessary to an understanding of and struggle with recalcitrant forces entrenched in the world.

In other words, a first necessity is the tempering of naïve enthusiasms by factual knowledge and accurate estimates of the hindrances within the Church to be overcome, if it is to be a real force in transforming an unchristian social order. Too often the strategy has been of the romantic sort employed by Lord George Germain, the British Secretary for war dur-

ing the American Revolution, who ordered General Howe to "sail up the Bronx River" in pursuit of Washington! The Bronx River was no bigger then than now; at best it could float a small rowboat. Yet there it was on the map, so the office desk strategist confidently ordered an embarkation. Far too many expeditions "up the Bronx River" have been undertaken with a similar valor of ignorance and jaunty hopefulness.

Such dealing with difficulties, which exist in tradition and outlook both in the pulpit and pew, does not call for denunciation. Denunciation is often good mental stimulation, but it is poor strategy. Denunciation is usually evidence of a lack of understanding both of the inherent conservative aspect of religion and of the conservative element in human nature. A clear recognition of both must be a part of any effective persuasion to carry out the social implications of Christian faith.

Many of the most serious obstacles are in the pulpit. They lie in the traditions of preaching, in the patterns of sermonic excellence derived from a vastly different and simpler day. These obstacles lie in the inadequate conception of the range and depth of the Christian message, conceptions which are also a heavy legacy from the past. There are also the obstacles of the insidious but strongly felt pressures on the minister, as unceasing and omnipresent as the atmospheric pressure of some fifteen pounds to the square inch.

Let us look first at the obstacles in the traditions

of preaching. Here, as elsewhere, what is called for is not moral blame, but understanding.

## I

One of the far-reaching influences which have acted upon preaching has been the restrictive power of what may, with some accuracy, at least, be called the "genteel tradition in preaching." Granville Hicks, in *The Great Tradition,* describing "the Aldriches, the Stedmans, and the Gilders, all the men who in the eighties and nineties loomed so large on our cultural horizon," says of them: "Remote from and unsensitive to the dominant tendencies and major needs of American life, they cast a fog of gentility over our literature."

"A fog of gentility over our literature"—that phrase states succinctly the thesis of what has been an increasingly dominant critical interpretation of American literature for the fifty or sixty years preceding the World War. Van Wyck Brooks was one of the first critics to stress it in his *America's Coming of Age,* published in 1915. Vernon L. Parrington, Charles A. Beard, and a host of others have filled out the picture in detail. Stated in a sentence, the thesis is that literature failed to do its possible and needed service in the interpretation of life because it was imprisoned by the "genteel tradition." It failed to achieve a vital contact with the contemporaneous issues and movements of its time. It accepted the limits of what was genteel, what was fitting, proper, and "nice" for drawing-room conversation; and, of

course, a leading article of furniture in the drawing rooms of the seventies and eighties was a screen.

Run a deadly parallel down through the fifty years in question, with the widely read books in one column and the most significant events of the time in another. That makes more evident the nature and effect of the "genteel tradition." On the one hand we have *When Knighthood Was in Flower,* John Fox, Jr., Paul Leicester Ford, even William Dean Howells. Out in the wicked world at the same time there was the "March of the Dinosaurs," that portentous advance of giant industrial combinations which were changing the face of America. The literary world was safely distant from the action of forces which were conditioning the destiny of the whole population. The brocaded historical romance and the nostalgic retreats of regional fiction had little interpretation for a world living in a machine-determined environment. Consequently, when "barbarian" writers invaded the polite reception going on in the drawing room, and spoiled the party by dragging in the issues of the street, there was a great scandal.

The same villain—the power of "the genteel tradition"—has played a large part in the preaching of the period. This is inevitably so, for no field of life exists in a vacuum, shut off from the forces which are acting on the total life of a time. Of course no idea or cluster of ideas applying to one field of activity can be lifted up and slapped down bodily on another field with the dogmatic statement that what fits one

fits the other. More than that, any attempt to explore the action of a reputed "genteel tradition in preaching" must make it emphatically clear that it is not indicting a whole profession, and, in particular, that it is not deaf, dumb and blind to the truly great preaching of our recent past, preaching which has wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions, and put to flight armies of aliens.

With those reservations well in mind, however, there is much to look at in the idea of a "genteel tradition" as it has had an imprisoning effect, not on literature, but on preaching. The pulpit has been constricted and circumscribed because it has so largely accepted as the proper field of preaching the decorous, the good, the true, the beautiful, in their more dignified and undisturbing aspects. Preaching has presented no adequately stubborn, incisive, and detailed challenge to a paganism steadily mounting and tightening its grip on the life of a nation over the past sixty years.

Bishop John H. Vincent, of the Methodist Church, used to have a lecture entitled "The Power of the Parlor." As one looks back and recalls that title, there is much more in it than meets the eye; much more than the bishop meant. Much preaching has been held captive by the power of the parlor; that is, attention has been directed to those areas of life which were visible from a trimly curtained parlor window. The result has frequently been a paralyzing remoteness from what was pressing painfully on people, and from those forces which were block-

ing the evangelistic and nurturing work of the Church.

Look at the following description of the vitiating power of the parlor as it affected the field of minor verse. Louis H. Kronenberger, in the introduction to his *Anthology of Light Verse,* published in 1935, thus describes it:

> In Victorian days "the fair sex" became "milady"; and all the technical skill of the Lockers and Dobsons fails to save their work from a certain prissiness and cloying prettyfication. Dobson (who is bookish as well as prudish) achieved the poetic equivalent of Victorian needlework. There is simply no life in him; he never rollicks and he never runs. His interminable rondeaus and ballades, perfect as so many of them are, all smell of the lamp and taste like marshmallow sauce. Actually a little of it goes a very long way. It is the genteel tradition applied to a minor form of culture, and the genteel tradition must everywhere be flouted if a better tradition is to flourish. It is banal, bodyless, sickeningly sweet.[1]

How many elaborately wrought specimens of the pulpit equivalent of Victorian needlework there have been!

Van Wyck Brooks, in the book mentioned above, trying to find an explanation of the great chasm which existed between professed American ethical ideals and business practice in the generation following the Civil War, picks out that noble institution, the baccalaureate sermon, as a symbol of the cause of the gap. The ethical and spiritual message moved

[1] Louis H. Kronenberger (Editor). *Anthology of Light Verse.* Reprinted by courtesy of the Modern Library, New York, 1935.

in a serene upper realm, and never touched at all the codes of business practice, running amuck down on the earth. That applies to more sermons than baccalaureates. The preacher went up into the stratosphere—the word was not invented, but he went up into it just the same—and the thin air of that detached and very remote idealism was a long distance from earth.

Follow back through fifty years and see what was going on in the America in which so much genteel preaching was done. All through the period there was the piling up of huge fortunes by robber barons, the rape of the resources of a continent. Federal troops in 1877 and in the nineties were being used to break the power of the labor movement. H. C. Frick introduced a new "iron age" into the steel industry by the importation of three hundred Pinkerton gunmen to do the slaughter at Homestead. In every great city the greed of landowners and sweatshop operators conspired to build loathsome and dangerous slums, with death rates for children under five of over one hundred to a thousand of population. And all through the period much of the preaching might have been done on the moon, as far as any relevance to these trends was concerned. The title of James Bridie's play, *A Sleeping Clergyman,* has an uncomfortable application to fifty years of the American pulpit.

Gentility comes not from the presence of God in preaching but from his absence. There was not too much preaching of God, but too little, in any vital

way that meshed into life. God is not genteel. Our God is a consuming fire.

High among the reasons for this blunted decorousness must be mentioned the malign influence of something known as homiletics. We make void the word of God by our tradition of what constitutes a good sermon. There is much bowing down to a graven image called a "good" sermon, as though there could be an absolutely good sermon. A sermon can be good only relatively to the accomplishment of a particular purpose. A "fog of gentility" has been cast over the pulpit by the tradition of the eloquent use of abstract general terms. Gellett Burgess has well described it in his quatrain:

"I wish that my room had a floor,
I don't so much care for a door,
But this walking around without touching the ground
Is getting to be quite a bore."

A vast amount of "walking around without touching the ground" has been done in the pulpit. Abstract terms are a deadly form of Protestant incense. They are vigorously swung before the eyes and nostrils of the congregation and the mind is asphyxiated.

The real moral liability of an addiction to generalities lies in the fact that preaching becomes dangerously effective just in the measure by which it gets into the concrete. Jesus was not crucified for saying, "Consider the lilies how they grow." What got him into trouble was saying, "Consider the thieves

in the Temple, how they steal." Of course, profound truth has to be stated in general terms. Jesus stated truth in highly general terms. But he also embodied it in sharply concrete language, making the application painfully and inescapably clear. The clarity of the application was frequently attested by the murmur with which it was received. He was at home on the "dangerous ground of controversial issues." Keeping truth forever in abstract and general terms subtly degenerates into evasion. The churches in their treatment of profit-centered industry have often come dangerously near the position of the "Know Nothing" party in American politics in the years before the Civil War. That party had one central position—the avoidance of slavery. But that was the crucial issue of the time! Bacon said of the Puritans, with a great deal of injustice, that "they tossed up and down the bread of life but brake it not." Discussion in purely general terms is the surest way of "tossing up and down the bread of life" without breaking it in the slightest degree for nourishment and quickening.

## II

The lack of social effectiveness of the Church is often principally due to a restricted outlook, both on the part of pulpit and pew. Minister and laymen simply have not seen, in any way that shocks and hurts with a permanent pain, the way in which our economic system works on human lives. The attention is trained in other directions. Most church

windows are opaque, and that is a symbol for a mental opaqueness which frequently resides within the Church. The "close" of a Cathedral is a very suggestive, and disturbing, symbol of this restricted outlook. It is frequently a beautiful garden spot shut away from the streets, a visible representation of "Peace, Perfect Peace within this world of sin." It may be a fair representation of a genuine glory of the Christian faith that it does furnish legitimate sanctuary from the ills of life. "A man shall be as . . . the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," "a shelter in a time of storm." One would have a painfully meager experience of life who failed to appreciate to the full that permanent element in the Christian religion represented by the hymn,

> "Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in thee."

But hiding oneself in God in that sense is a very different thing from hiding one's eyes to the havoc which greed and injustice have made in God's world. From such a scene no followers of Him who looked steadily at sin, sorrow, and tragedy have a right to avert their eyes. In Zweig's *Marie Antoinette* there is told with vivid detail the familiar story of the attempt of Louis XVI and the royal family to escape from France. Zweig has one significant detail which does not appear in Carlyle's classic description. He says that when the party was arrested at Varennes and Marie Antoinette was forced to spend the night in the home of the town baker, it was the first time

in all her years as queen of France that she had ever crossed the threshold of the home of a workingman. Locked up in that little fact was one real cause of the French Revolution. A similar mental remoteness from aching areas of life is easily possible to the preacher, even amid all the clamors of the depression, particularly if he is the pastor, as he usually is, of a middle-class congregation. So much of the data compelling a thoroughgoing questioning of the whole social order is hidden from the sight of one who does not deliberately seek it. The majority of comfortably fixed people follow as regular a "beat" in their daily routine of life as does a policeman. The human erosion during a depression is as well screened from that "beat" as the cruelties of Nazi Germany have been screened from the casual onlooker. An impressive expression of the suffering underneath a fair exterior is found in the deeply moving book of Stefan Lorant's *I Was Hitler's Prisoner.* He thus describes his feelings on his release from jail:

> The sun was shining. The streets looked the same as usual. Calm, peace, and order reigned. And yet, a few yards away, hundreds, thousands of innocent people were locked up in cells; a few yards away from the peaceful scene before me the victims of national Socialism were torturing themselves and being tortured. I see now how it is that travelers from abroad can write of Germany: "There is perfect order here." They are only allowed to see the surface of things.[2]

[2] Stefan Lorant, *I Was Hitler's Prisoner.* G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1935.

The same deceptive covering is a continual liability in our outlook on our own surrounding world. Here again it needs to be stressed that the cause is not lack of intelligence, willful blindness or moral cowardice, but something far more intangible and insidious—the restrictions of accustomed interests and preoccupations. There is a shrewd bit of psychological insight in the quaint verses of Wallace Irwin, entitled "The Worried Skipper":

" 'I hates to think of dyin',' says the skipper to the mate;
'Starvation, shipwrecks, heart disease, I loathes to contemplate.
I hates to think of vanities and all the crimes they lead to—'
Then says the mate,
With looks sedate,
'You doesn't reely need to.' "[3]

There is the moral liability—we do not really need to think of the things we "loathes to contemplate." There are many effective ways of unconsciously erecting mental barricades around us; many ways of wearing blinders without deliberately putting them on. Rarely has this process of raising a mental barricade been put with more frank and explicit self-examination than by Gamaliel Bradford in his *Journal.* What he brings up into the light of pitiless examination is usually buried so deep below the threshold of consciousness that one is unaware of it. On the occasion of picking up a copy of *The New Republic* in 1921, he writes:

[3] *Century Magazine,* May, 1907.

"Amused at my spiritual attitude with regard to these advanced and radical publications. I shrink from them with absolute terror. . . . Now isn't that a state of mind for a would-be intelligent man to be proud of? . . . I am afraid to read radical books lest they should lead me perforce to radical conclusions and I should feel bound to sell all I have and give to the poor."

Bradford, of course, did not know it, but that restricted outlook vitiates his work and condemned him to be far less of an interpreter than he might have been because he never came to grips with the dominant facts and forces of his time. After these observations he goes on to make another one, a few months later, again with a relentless honesty, an observation which ought to cause self-searching to every reader and particularly to every Christian preacher and teacher.

"I do not dare to read the New Testament," he wrote, "for fear of its awakening a storm of anxiety and self-reproach and doubt and dread of having taken the wrong path, of having been traitor to the plain and simple God."[4]

One of the most characteristic miracles of the New Testament is the anointing of eyes. The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the anointing of eyes. The effect of such anointing today, of a piercing look at the human results of our way of life, is expressed in the word of one observer to the effect that the revival of religion will come, not when the

[4] Van Wyck Brooks (Editor). *Journal of Gamaliel Bradford.* Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933.

world rediscovers religion, but when religion rediscovers the world.

The more open a system is to question, the greater the sin of questioning becomes. Refusal to chant the slogans of business-inspired optimism is rapidly becoming the sin against the Holy Ghost. In 1873 a Philadelphia newsboy was arrested for crying out his papers on the street. "All about the failure of Jay Cooke." The facts were indisputable, but the boy was not sounding a constructive note! The psychology which led to that arrest is widespread and powerful in America today. The very difficulty of standing up against it augments the necessity of preserving the critical faculty.

## III

The long tradition of predominant emphasis on individual morality has been a major obstacle to a revolutionary Christianity. This is so obvious as to require mere mention rather than any extended discussion. Emphasis on individual morality is due in part to a lasting insight of the Christian religion. It is due to an understanding of the importance of individual personality and character, and the inwardness of religion. But when that insight has become exclusive, it has resulted in loyalty to a fraction of the message. Its results are well stated in the words of a man never regarded as a social radical, Dean Inge: "The doctrine that Christianity is a guide for individual conduct only is purely detestable, and if generally followed, it would turn the civilized world

into a hell." To the extent that it has been followed, it has turned the civilized world into a hell. Yet the field of individual conduct has so overwhelmingly engaged the attention of a large number of preachers that their range could be described in words applied to a movie actress, "she stretched the whole gamut from A to B." An illustration of this predominant thinking in terms of individual habits is the church official who said in November, 1935, that Hitler was not so bad, because he neither smoked nor drank! Also the large number of ministers who replied to President Roosevelt's requests for comment on his policies with exclusive attention to denouncing his support of the repeal of Prohibition.

Let but one illustration of the circumscribing of moral endeavor suffice. Robert Briffault writes, "We have been quick at suppressing literature, slow at suppressing war; zealous in the abolition of obscene postal cards, luke-warm in the suppression of obscene slums; active in pulling down white slavery, apathetic in pulling down wage slavery; alert in preventing vice, slothful in preventing starvation."

## IV

An obstacle far more difficult either to isolate for examination or to counteract is to be found in the persistence of the mood and temper of sentimentalism rather than realism in religious thinking. Among the many contributing causes of this are some of great moral and spiritual worth, such as

idealism and emotion. Christianity is a high idealism, and conceiving of life and interpreting life in terms of that idealism is an essential part of its task. Again, an essential part of the Christian religion is a legitimate stimulation of emotion. A religion which does not touch emotion does not move life. But idealism and emotion which are not disciplined and tempered by the faculty of objective scrutiny of fact become a prey to sentimentalism.

It is also a liability of organized religion that by a strange but understandable psychological inversion, people are able to compensate for hardness and cruelty in the conduct of their affairs by a sentimental softness in their religion. The late Judge Elbert H. Gary, in the midst of his bitter fight for the retention of the twelve-hour day in the steel mills, could find refreshment and comfort in the singing of old-time gospel hymns. Archbishop William Temple has observed the same thing in England. "It is quite common," he writes, "for people who are rather hard in their practical dealings most of the week, to have a special love for strongly sentimental hymns on Sunday evenings." Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect, in a newspaper interview in November, 1935, made an observation as pertinent to much preaching as it is to the type of New York architecture he was discussing. He said that a great deal of contemporary architecture is unreal and meaningless, being "devised by refugees from reality for refugees from reality."

The undisciplined religious emotion is liable to

become a means of befuddling the mind, and distracting the attention from clear ethical issues. Employers have seized on this liability again and again as a means of helping to break a strike. They have shrewdly manipulated the power of religious emotion to distract. In certain parts of the South, where the labor force was preponderantly Protestant and conditioned to an emotionalized form of religion, it was almost a part of strike-breaking strategy to send for an evangelist. It is a refined form of fighting the strikers with tear gas. Lloyd George has included in his war memoirs a recital (in which he takes unconcealed pride) of the technique in using emotion to break a strike of Welsh miners during the World War. When General Smuts went down to face angry miners, he followed a hint which Lloyd George gave him, to "mellow" the miners by getting them to sing. General Smuts began his speech by saying, "I have heard that the Welsh are amongst the greatest singers of the world, and before I start, I want you first of all to sing me some of the songs of your people." Like a flash, somebody in that huge mass struck up "Land of My Fathers." Every soul present sang in Welsh and with the deepest fervor. "When they had finished, they just stood, and I could see that the thing was over."[5] He had only to speak a few words, and the men went back to the mines! It all sounds like the planned explosion of an asphyxiating bomb. Such manipulating of emotion

[5] *War Memoirs of Lloyd George,* Vol. III. Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1933.

seems a long long way from the normal worship and preaching and life of the churches. But it is only a dramatic instance of the ethical and spiritual dangers which lie wrapped up in a religion that is sentimental in its general outlook.

Newspaper reports of Sunday sermons during the past five years have disclosed an appalling amount of naïve comment by ministers on the economic situation, a disconcerting lack of even the most elementary penetration into ethical issues involved. One New York preacher tells his congregation in the summer of 1935 that the real reason for the epidemic of labor troubles was the repeal of Prohibition. That ought to take the blue ribbon for economic profundity, but there is much competition in the field. Another New York preacher offered as a solution for all that is before us "the redigging of those ancient foundations of prosperity and happiness which nourished the lives of our forefathers in the epic periods of American history." "We do insist," the same preacher cried out on another Sunday, "that a return to the purified principles of American social life, which have been cynically cast aside by theoretical social dreamers, will give American business a chance to rebuild on the basis of natural economic laws."

Far worse than such empty bombast is the ethical illiteracy so frequently manifested. Here is one pastor, the rector of one of the richest churches of America, criticizing the New York City administration for daring to suggest a municipal lighting plant. "The city of New York's threat to establish power

plants," he said, as reported in the New York *Times*, "will result in a shrinkage in the value of investments held by charities, widows, and other organizations." The fact of the hold-up of the entire population now going on evidently did not seem to come into his range of vision, which was entirely occupied with possible shrinkage of dividends. Here is another New York rector celebrating in the name of religion the passage of a state sales tax. "There should be a general prayer of thanksgiving throughout our city," he intones, "that a means has finally been arrived at with which to meet the distress of the coming weather."

All of these quotations simply emphasize one truth: Boy Scouts are not enough for the ministry of the Church. The deep tragedy is most clearly seen when the heritage of the Church in the piercing ethical realism of Jesus is recalled. To claim his authority for naïve sentimentalism is as great a libel as to claim authority of a Doctor Osler for the medical philosophy of Mary Baker Eddy.

## V

It is very easy to wax indignant and eloquent over the entanglement of the Church in the present economic system. But easy indignation is very often the most superficial attitude which can be taken to a complex matter. It tends to substitute a subjective satisfaction for an objective examination. It short-circuits thinking. No real grasp of the situation will be made without a recognition of the naturalness of

the Church being entangled with the economic order in which it is set. It is an organization which derives its support, in part at least, from the profits of the present system. It would be strange if a body as large as the Church, made up of a cross section of the population, did not develop many entanglements, conscious and unconscious, with the processes out of which the support of a large part of its members, and through them, of itself, comes. In addition to this, there is the exceedingly difficult task with which preaching the social implications of Christian faith is confronted, the task of winning the support of people for courses of action which when carried out will limit their profits and power. In this respect, social preaching often has a lack of immediate appeal like that of foreign missions in Tibet. It is remote from what many regard as their interests. Indeed, it rates lower in pulling power than evangelistic work in Tibet, for Tibet has no threat to present privileges. Lord Macaulay has well described the psychology which operates on the minister and other church leaders in this respect in his classic statement that "the worst of all rulers is he who puts the feelings of those he sees clearly before the interests of those millions he will never see." All this can be recognized without condoning the defense of existing injustices. The understanding of both the naturalness and the difficulties will equip for a realistic approach to the obstacle.

That obstacle of a deflection of the Church's ethical insight by involvement in the present order is rather

graphically pictured in an architectural item which appeared in the newspapers of New York in July, 1935. It was reported that the spire of Trinity Church on Broadway at the head of Wall Street had leaned eighteen inches toward Wall Street. Observations had shown that this leaning process had been going on for several years. A good many church towers have leaned perceptibly toward Wall Street! Their weight has been deflected in greater or less degree toward the existing order. It is easy to understand the tendency and process. But what must not be forgotten is that this process puts the Church out of plumb with the standard of Jesus. Insidiously and without any conscious betrayal of their proclaimed beliefs, people in the churches become very critical of forces making for economic change. President N. H. MacCracken, of Vassar College, has given a very close parallel to this influence in church affairs, in his description of the similar pressure on the college president. He writes: "Let the college leader address himself to a burning question such as birth control, to starting a dispassionate forum for international policies; let him express an interest in the Soviet point of view, or defend a searching study of the emotions, and almost instantly the fire starts, to be smothered with equal speed by those powers that are highly resolved that, whatever happens, there shall be no deficit."[6] There is also the dim fear for the fortunes of the organization, the fear that the Church itself may be destroyed or seri-

[6] *The Saturday Review of Literature.*

ously impaired by radical forces. Thus often without any conscious design the material welfare of the organization becomes far more important than the principles, the furtherance of which constitute the only valid reason for the existence of the organization. The result of this entanglement is the development of what H. G. Wells calls "muffled Christianity." He says of one of his characters that "she was taught at school, what I may best describe as 'muffled Christianity,' a temperate and discreet system designed primarily not to irritate parents." The muffled form of Christian faith and expression which is so common a feature of the ecclesiastical landscape is not designed to spare irritation to parents, but to avoid a head-on challenge to things as they are. Rigorous and exacting elements in the message are toned down, blunt surfaces are rounded, the whole thing is "stream-lined" in the modern manner to reduce resistance.

The most subtle form of this entanglement comes in the shape of financial obligations, mortgages or otherwise, by which the raising of the budget, or payment of fixed charges, becomes the main item of unfinished business, No. 1 on the agenda, so commanding that other items shrink in comparison. There is some occasional truth, at least, in the current saying that, for a church, "going Gothic" means "going Republican." A Gothic plant, with a mortgage running in the neighborhood of half a million, is a reliably stout anchor on a ship. It keeps the craft from sailing very far from its economic base.

Three years ago Dr. Edgar DeWitt Jones, of Detroit, described a walk down that notable street of churches, Woodward Avenue, Detroit. He singles out six churches located within ten blocks and says that their financial burdens and struggles "illustrate the tragedy of Protestantism."[7] Doctor Jones pictures the churches as making heroic struggles in a day of financial deflation. But the plight of the churches illustrates something much deeper and more acute than deflated income. It pictures the obstacles which hinder a church's concentration on ministry to a community, when it is burdened with mortgages and other hostages to the present order. Church No. 1 he describes as "carrying on dauntlessly despite a titanic building debt." At church No. 2 the pastor is "endeavoring to raise a ten thousand dollar deficit in the current budget." The pastor of church No. 3 is "patient amidst a diminishing budget and tightening economic pressure." At church No. 4 they are studying "methods of reducing expenditures and brace their backs to a herculean load." Church No. 5 is "still the home of near-millionaires, yet staggering a little under a financial body blow that the banking debacle gave our city." Church No. 6 "with a mighty indebtedness, cuts budgets fifty per cent and not a whimper, only a tightening of the belt and purpose heroic." These quotations make very plain that the burdens on churches, typical of hundreds throughout the country, are primarily the burdens of self-maintenance and debt service. They are distracting and

[7] *The Christian Century*, November 22, 1933.

preoccupying burdens, driving the mind inward, with all the intensity of a toothache.

It is hard to see how any genuine liberation of the prophetic spirit in the churches can be made possible without a decided lessening of their material stake in the economic order. To say that is not to forget for a moment that courageous prophetic witness against present evils is now being carried on in many churches with elaborate structure and often with equally elaborate mortgage. But careful observation leads one to the conclusion that such cases are exceptions rather than the rule, and are due to exceptional insight, spirit, and courage in the minister. It is worth pondering in this connection how much of Jesus' early teaching to his disciples was given to freeing them from the preoccupation of worry. His disciples must be liberated from the hampering self-absorption of "what shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed." As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.

Professor Lavens M. Thomas II, of Emory University, has made an historical observation which has a very pertinent relationship to this particular theme. He has discovered that in the first *Discipline* of the Methodist Episcopal Church, adopted by the first Conference at which the Church was organized, December 27, 1784, there appeared this advice on church buildings, "Let all churches be built plain and decent, and with free seats, but not more expensive than is absolutely unavoidable, otherwise the necessity of raising money will make rich men

necessary to us. But, if so, we must be dependent on them, yea, and be governed by them. And then farewell to Methodist discipline, if not Methodist doctrine, too" (*Discipline,* 1788 edition, p. 35).

The subsequent history of that deep ethical and psychological insight is suggestive. That advice remained in the *Discipline* of the Church until after the division into two churches in 1844. It remained in the *Discipline* of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, until 1854, and in that of the Methodist Episcopal Church until some twelve years later. In both cases the penetrating comment on the possible effect of expensive church buildings was dropped out, leaving the advice ending with the words, "but not more expensive than is absolutely unavoidable." An interesting exhibit of the toning down of a spiritual and ethical declaration!

The heart of the matter—and nothing in the world affects more vitally the future of the Christian Church—is that so easily the Church can become involved in the established order of things in the social and economic world that it finds any kind of effective protest against the evils of that system increasingly difficult. It is not because the Church has made any conscious surrender of its principles, but by a very natural and insidious process it depends so on wealth and the established order for its support that it becomes part of the very thing it should struggle against. The underlying philosophy is not very different from the piece of distilled prudence, "Don't bite the hand that feeds you." The result

often is such an increase in prudence that the Church's lips are sealed even in the presence of glaring wrong. The result is an ironical anticlimax of having built a magnificent place in which to say something and then having nothing to say. What shall it profit a church to gain a whole world of Gothic arches and stained-glass windows and lose its own voice?

## VI

These are some of the obstacles to a revolutionary Christianity which lie within the Church, in its traditions, its inheritance, its mentality. Were we to consider in even a very superficial manner the obstacles which lie outside the Church, in the world, we would have as our theme the whole spread of life, the industrial and the business and financial order in which we live, and the ways of thought and habit which that order generates. That kind of obstacle has been in some measure the theme of this whole volume. But for the sake of rounding out this particular picture in this chapter a few of the formidable obstacles may be here listed.

The first, of course, is the fact that any threat to profits or power always meets with violent resistance. A second obstacle is the tremendous weight of inertia making for the continuing of things as they are. A third obstacle lies in something more intangible but just as powerful. It is the refusal to pay any real attention to the demand for reappraisal of any existing system. That is a constant feature of history in

every field—ecclesiastical, industrial, economic, literary, artistic, and political. The capacity of those who are the beneficiaries of any system to remain placidly undisturbed by conditions demanding change is beautifully illustrated in an incident at the very beginning of the French Revolution. In M. Madelin's *History of the French Revolution* there is a dramatic description of the opening session of the Estates General at Versailles in 1789. The very meeting itself was a symbol of the extremity of the plight of France; for the calling together of the three estates for the first time in centuries was obviously a last resort, postponed until the complete bankruptcy of the government—financial, moral, and intellectual—made that last desperate venture inescapable.

Louis XVI, arrayed in the robes of the Order of the Holy Ghost (and there is a lovely bit of irony in the costume!) sat on a throne on a platform at the front of the hall. At the opening session La Fare the Bishop of Nancy made a direct, vigorous speech, picturing the suffering of the people and ending with a strong plea to the king to give justice. It was a powerful setting forth of the conditions in France, which literally shrieked to the skies demanding a new type of statesmanship. But the king, being one of the few persons in the hall who had had a full dinner, fell asleep after the first few minutes. The rest of the Bishop's address was punctuated by the royal snores of the monarch, which reverberated throughout the building.

Those snores were a prophecy of the next few years. The king, and the whole ruling order, had no technique for meeting a complicated social and economic situation except a snore; and that, alas, proved hardly adequate. They could not deal with the situation by head or heart; and the nose was unfortunately quite unable to meet the responsibility thrown upon it.

Mr. William J. Bryan once ventured into the field of translating the Bible into modern speech, with considerable addition to the clarity of the text which he retranslated. He called the attention of a campaign audience on one occasion to a verse in Proverbs which reads thus: "The wise man seeth a pit and avoideth it; the foolish man passeth on and falleth into it." Mr. Bryan went on to explain that what the author of Proverbs was trying to say was this: "A wise man gets an idea in the head. A foolish man gets it *in the neck.*"

There could be no better illustration of the difference between getting an idea into the head and getting it "in the neck" than that afforded by Louis XVI. He was unable to get the idea of the need of France into the head; so he got it—quite literally—"in the neck"! Unfortunately, the process of education by way of the neck rather than the head did not stop with the French Revolution. The last few years have been a long and painful discipline of education. Men and nations have been "getting it in the neck" because of the lack of any genuine ability to get into their heads the need for the social, eco-

nomic, and international organization which the occasions of today demand.

Here comes to hand in the United States a survival of the Bourbon spirit so perfect, so exquisitely flawless, that it seems at first to be the work of a great satirist, doing a classic piece of burlesque on the spirit of the die-hard *ancient regime.* The only flaw in it, as a burlesque, would be that it is somewhat overdone. And yet, on looking at it, as it appeared in the newspapers, we must allow incredulity to give way to the sober realization that a big business magnate actually said it seriously. Here is Mr. Edward F. Hutton, chairman of the board of General Foods Corporation, calling on all industry that it "gang up" on the Roosevelt administration; that it organize a lobby overshadowing all other lobbies, and that it eliminate from public life any man who interferes with its purposes.

His proposal was made, most appropriately, in a signed article in *Public Utilities Fortnightly.*

After reviewing the treatment accorded utilities, Mr. Hutton wrote: "Why have not these other industries whose interests are almost identical with those of the electrical industry 'ganged up' with the utilities and presented an unbroken front in opposition to government competition and punitive legislation? Why hasn't all business and industry joined in the fight? . . . If the major industries of this country do not hang together, if they do not openly call their stockholders and employes to the colors of a 1935 declaration of independence, the radicals that now

infest the executive and legislative departments of our government will joyously hang them all separately."

After a few words about the specters of Communism and Fascism, Mr. Hutton proposed organization of an American federation of business and frankly suggested that it be used to eliminate from public life men opposed to its purposes.

"All industry, big and little, has a stake in this controversy between the administration and public utilities," he said. "If the government should succeed in carrying out plans so carefully drafted by the radical Socialists, all industry must suffer sooner or later. So I say, 'Let's gang up!' "[8]

There it is in all its beauty: "Let's gang up." What do any of us grand Dukes of Privilege care about the United States of America, as long as we can defend the utility profits, or hold on to our particular pile of profits? "After us, the deluge."

A factor in the situation peculiar to America might be called the traditional American fear of a thinker. It is part of the democratic tradition which made itself felt in the pioneer days and first found powerful expression in the tide of feeling which carried Andrew Jackson into the Presidency. The passion for equality made itself felt in the widely accepted idea that any man was qualified by the very fact of his American citizenship to fill any position. In fact, he was better qualified than an expert. That feeling played a real part in the growth of the spoils

[8] The *New York World-Telegram.*

system in politics. It has survived in a persistent distrust of the expert, the theorist, the specially qualified man. The most recent expression of that deep-seated feeling was the scorn implied in the term "brain trust" as applied to a group of President Roosevelt's advisers. It was easy to make political capital out of the epithet, because of the existence of the traditional disparagement of brains. The idea of a professor of economics, for instance, having any wisdom or knowledge beyond that of "practical" politicians was a cause of side-splitting laughter to large numbers of people.

That same perversion of the democratic idea has operated in many other fields than that of politics. In no realm has it had a more deadening and sinister influence than in that of education. It is one great source of the easily stirred periodical hue and cry against "fads and frills" in education, and the loudly professed devotion to the three R's. A second-rate school politician has a far better chance of ready acceptance as the director of schools in many communities than a man who has done real thinking in the field of education. There is a deep-rooted fear of the application of ideas to institutions.

It is inevitable that the same aversion to fresh and fruitful thinking should make itself felt in the realm of the application of religion to life. All the devices for heaping opprobrium on any Cassius with a lean and hungry look, who thinks too much, are brought up and set into action. This is true not only outside the Church but often inside. The files of a

prominent denominational weekly for the last dozen years will reveal a sum total of sneer, innuendo, and misrepresentation brought to bear by the editor on the group in the Church working for industrial democracy, which would be a fair record even for the Hearst newspapers. This bent in the popular mind, this apprehensive anxiety about the process of thinking described by Matthew Arnold as "turning a stream of fresh and free thought on our stock notions and habits" is easily manipulated by those whose interest it is to maintain the economic *status quo*. Anyone daring to raise fundamental questions is damned as a theorist, doctrinaire, visionary, or red, and the gummed label sticks, in the minds of a large number of persons.

Mere mention is all that is needed concerning another obstacle—the long and strong tradition of individual advancement. This emphasis on the sacred quality of individual push and private ownership, had its origin in the opportunities which pioneering days unquestionably gave to the forceful individual. The tradition of that opportunity persists long years after the conditions which made it a reality have passed away. That venerated idol still commands the allegiance of crowds long after it has had any relation to the facts of life in a mechanized society, with no more geographical frontier. Its persistence is one strong block to the socialization of the chief and most important means of production, even to the slightest degree.

The two obstacles just mentioned are made doubly

powerful when given a patriotic flavor, as is usually done by privilege groups manipulating them. Resistance to realistic thinking in terms of present conditions of life is piously wrapped in red-white-and-blue bunting. There are laws in some states that the flag cannot be used for advertising purposes. There is no law against the dressing of economic propaganda in flags. Any idea, movement, or organization which raises questions touching the present flow of profits is subversive, un-American. As a result of this patriotic coloring put upon the present industrial setup, there are multitudes of persons to whom "Americanism" is inseparable in thought from the methods which produced the fortunes of the Robber Barons, the bank failures, the feudalism of the coal fields, and the autocracy of hundreds of factory owners. Emerson made an observation in his *Journal* back in 1824 which has an uncanny fitness to the patriotic fever of manufacturers' associations and chambers of commerce and Liberty Leagues in 1936. He wrote, "I am a little cynical on some topics, and when a whole nation is roaring patriotism at the top of its voice, I am fain to explore the cleanness of its hands and the purity of its heart." It is a pity Emerson never lived to witness the patriotic eloquence of the light-and-power companies shrieking against the Tennessee Valley Development as un-American!

Finally, there is all the time, what Aldous Huxley so finely calls, "the gangrenous insensitiveness of money."

## VII

Even such a hasty and sketchy survey as this chapter affords of the obstacles to a revolutionary Christianity is oppressive and disconcerting. One may well exclaim, "Such a massing of difficulties, calls for nothing less than a revolution in mental habits!" Exactly; and that, admittedly, is a very difficult sort of revolution to bring about. Yet, if we will allow the phrase, "a revolution in mental habits," to stay in our minds long enough to turn around, we will discover that that is just what Jesus called for, nothing less, at the very beginning of his ministry. "Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." Repent—that was his preface to the Kingdom; get a new mind, make a revolution in your mental habits. The revolution in ways of thinking needed is not a strange new departure in Christianity. It is a return to the opening word of Jesus.

The method must also be the method in which he put his trust. For the very next words in the first chapter of Mark, in which the call for a new mind is sounded, record his beginning of the formation of a small group. "Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew. . . . And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me." Two of the great centers of Christian faith and strategy in two consecutive verses—"repent"—and the means.

## Chapter VII

# THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL STRUGGLE TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

NOTHING is more commonly heard within the Church as an objection to bringing religion to bear on economic life than the statement that such procedure will destroy "spirituality." This fear is frequently expressed with the most earnestness by those who are deriving the greatest benefit from the present economic order. But it is not merely the rich and relatively powerful who are jealous guardians of so-called spirituality. The concern lest Christianity be vitiated and despiritualized by being taken into the rough arena of business to fight with lions is widespread.

About that commonly expressed fear two things may be said. One is of minor importance; the other is central to the whole matter of the reality of religion.

The first is that it is just the remoteness of the message of the Church from the dominant economic and political questions of the time which gives the greatest opportunity to the demagogue and the interested press to malform the public mind. Attention has already been called to the delineation in Means's book, *Things That Are Caesar's,* to this very result

of a German pietism and formalism which by their very withdrawal from the problems and struggles of the economic and social world helped to pave the way for Hitlerism. A Church which is completely silent on the social forces of tremendous significance for life, merely leaves the field open for sinister powers to shape public opinion for their own advantage. That has happened through the years and is happening today. It is just as though the Church in many instances were saying: "You go ahead, Mr. Hearst; do what you wish to with my people. I have nothing to say."

The other truth is vastly more important. It is pivotal in the question of the vitality and power of the Christian religion. It is the truth that the surest way to the development and preservation of a genuine spiritual power in a Church's life is through struggle with the forces which are preying upon men and frustrating their abundant life. Spirituality is never developed in a vacuum. The attempt has been made so to develop it all through Christian history and has always been futile. It is not something in itself which can be created directly; it is a by-product of the investment of life in Christlike endeavor.

It is like the endeavor to make one's heart beat faster. It cannot be done by saying, "I will now make my heart beat fast." It is done most surely by forgetting one's heart and making some physical exertion, some exercise or work demanding the expenditure of energy. Spiritual vitality is in a similar way a by-product of the expenditure of energy. Some

of the greatest tragedies of Christian history have come from a perverted preoccupation with something called "spiritual life." That perversion has put religion into an isolation ward away from human need. It is a danger which comes to every generation in a new form.

Joseph Conrad writes in one of his novels that "the peace of God begins ten miles from land." That judgment pictures a very common idea in religion. It is a common feeling that the peace of God begins ten miles away from any concrete struggle to establish the will of God, to bring justice and love into the framework of civilization. That is shown by the frequent use of the word "secular." Things which are vitally related to the welfare of God's children and the realization of brotherhood are dubbed secular, while things which are far away, "ten miles from land," in a fog bank of subjective generalities, are "spiritual." To this matter the primary word of Jesus has a direct application, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." To a very real degree spiritual power is a result of seeking the kingdom of God. It is a quality and dimension of life added through the process of seeking the reign of God. Such social struggle has been through history a pathway to assurance of God.

Go back in recollection to some of the high points in the spiritual experience of the race, to some of the high calls of God and the great answers to them recorded in the Bible. Take the call of Moses as it

is told through the story of a burning bush from which came the voice of Jehovah. A long interval had passed between Moses' identifying himself with his brethren the children of Israel in Pharaoh's brickyard and this experience of a divine commission to be the instrument of God in freeing his people from slavery. It is very notable that the call of God came into the consciousness of Moses wholly in terms of that social conflict back in Egypt. Moses had not forgotten the loads and lashes of his brothers in bondage. After the long interval of years he is still thinking of it. From that experience of fellowship in struggle with his fellows he comes to the assurance that it is God's struggle as well. He reaches the conviction that there is a more than human support for justice and freedom. That experience of Moses is close to the experience of multitudes. Participation in effort has given experience of human values so great and commanding that they bring the assurance of taking hold of something central in the universe, on a God who says, "Let my people go."

Consider the close relation of the great experience of Isaiah, as recorded in the sixth chapter of Isaiah, to a sense of identification with the need of his people. "I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." Then comes the great dedication: "Who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." His life was in motion under the impact of a great commission. It was not first a subjective experience. The spiritual experience was in terms of a people's need.

Come up to the highest spiritual experience of all, Jesus' entry upon his ministry. Note what Jesus names as the supreme evidences of the presence of the Spirit of God. What are they—inward glow and delight? Nothing of the kind!

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor:
He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised.
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

This high ministry was conceived in the image of a world in which broken things should be restored and frustrated things made complete. What God hath joined together, social struggle and spiritual power, let no man put asunder.

It is very interesting and instructive to note the first flow of gifts in the Christian Church. It was not, as might seem most natural, from the home base out to the frontier. It was the other way—from the fringe back to the center. The collections which the apostle Paul was taking continually were not, like our missionary offerings, to be sent out to pioneering expeditions. They were the offerings from the frontier to be carried back to Jerusalem.

There is a similar flow of strength from the frontier endeavor back to the center of spiritual life and faith itself. When that social endeavor stops, when the flow back ceases, the faith itself grows anemic.

It loses its object, a God of love, for an experience of a God of love can only be kept alive by the practice of love.

If we study the first three chapters of the Acts with some care, we shall find that two things are closely allied: the new surge of power, that quickening of the being which came to the company of Christians gathered in Jerusalem, and their facing the social tasks of their time. The two things are tied up together. We will never understand what happened in the upper room in Jerusalem, unless we look at it in connection with the disciples' attitude to the world outside of the room.

The point most often forgotten is this: the disciples received the Pentecostal power when they faced the Pentecostal task. Pentecost began before they went to the upper room. It began when they ceased gazing upward into the skies on Mount Olivet and made their way back to Jerusalem. In doing that they faced their world of need, of danger, of opportunity. Before that quickening experience, symbolized in the book of Acts by the tongues of fire, that little company had made definite plans for a forward thrust to carry Christ into the contemporary world. The election of a disciple to take the place of Judas looked in that direction.

Now, of course, we must not read back into the apostolic age any of our modern social conceptions. When we say that little company faced the social task of their time, we do not mean that they made a community survey. We have no right to try to make the

apostles speak the language of twentieth-century social reform. They spoke many languages at Pentecost, but they certainly did not speak that one! We do violence to dress them up in present-day sack suits. Such treatment is on a par with any other form of violence or dishonesty. Nevertheless, we fail to grasp the full meaning of the story unless we see that there was a definite determination to carry Christ out into the world with a clear realization that that process would definitely change the world.

What the experience seems to teach is a lesson of enormous significance for the Church of our day and of any day, that God gives power only to men who need it. He does not waste power. He gives it to those who have tackled something so big, so overwhelming, that their own resources are quite insufficient. Such a tackling of a task too big for human power is the opening of the door through which there comes the rushing of a mighty wind of the spirit.

It is easy to begin with this matter of spiritual power at the wrong end. The first step to get power is not to ask for it, but to put ourselves into such desperate conditions that we need it. If we face Christ's task in our day, we will find that the reality of that conflict will bring the zest which we feel in the New Testament.

When we think of the Christian task in terms of one means of engaging in it—the Church—we are inevitably driven to see the necessity of more effective church unity. That is so painfully clear that

to dwell on it is but laboring the obvious. Effective defiance of an orthodoxy oppressive to the freedom and growth of the spirit of man, speaks in terms of "we" rather than "I." Of course there have been great red-letter days in history, when humanity has moved forward under the momentum of some sharp and timely "I," pronounced courageously, some individual against the world. But "we" is the only word which has sustained long campaigns. We find that word in effective defiance of worldly power in the Old Testament, as in the book of Daniel. "Be it known unto thee, O King, that *we* . . ." We find it in the New Testament, "We must obey God rather than men." Dr. D. S. Freeman, in his long analysis of the battle of Gettysburg, in his life of Robert E. Lee, came to the conclusion that behind all the many aspects of the battle, there was one main reason for Lee's defeat: "He attacked in sections and was defeated in sections."[1] That epitaph is applicable to a large part of recent history of organized Christianity—attack by sections issuing in defeat by sections.

Yet that phrase, "church unity," has a larger and more insistent meaning than merely that of a closer co-operative or union of separate denominations. Deeper than the necessity of the union of churches with each other is the necessity of the union of Church with mankind. That is the union which will bring an access of spiritual power which nothing else can supply. The sensitive imagination which

[1] D. S. Freeman, *Robert E. Lee.* Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1935.

can feel the burdens which rest heavily and cut cruelly on the backs of men, women, and children, the sharing of the aspirations of the defrauded, an indignation akin to that of Jesus over all that maims or mangles God's little ones—these are marks of a union of Church with humanity for which the days cry out.

To come to our journey's end in the discussion of this book at this point will leave any readers who have come thus far with many unanswered questions. Some of these questions lie in the field of the means of accomplishing a transfer of economic power. Many who admit the necessity of a large measure of socialization may feel a justifiable irritation and say that the discussion stops just where it ought to begin, with considering the concrete steps by which the economic planning and social control are to be brought about. What are the gradations from here to there?

Concerning such questions there are several things which may be said. The first is that there is no lack of books and detailed discussions on every aspect of the strategy leading to socialization. Another is that the theme of this book has been very definitely the contribution of the Christian faith to the development of the conviction of the necessity of a very large measure of socialization as a part of a Christian order of society. Consideration has already been given in Chapter IV to some of the problems of action in a "meanwhile" generation. The most important thing to be said, however, is that a necessary preliminary to any real progress to a socialized order is the crea-

tion of the desire for it and the willingness to pay the price. Within the thought and life of the Church we are still, in spite of a generation of discussion, in the initial stages of that preliminary necessity. A great deal of time and effort can be wasted in marking out specific methods by which a thing can be done when there is no effective desire to do it. The great need within the Church is not for a rigid ideology of social revolution. It is the need for an understanding of and response to the Christian imperatives to a socialized order. Without that understanding and desire the plotting of diagrams of steps to economic revolution is like marking out irrigation ditches in a desert country before water to fill them has been made available. The steps and the desire to move in them must come together.

The problem of making authoritative the implicit compulsions of the gospel to social change is a problem of evangelism, and the first concern of evangelism must be the conviction of sin. In the realm of social effort we are at the stage of evangelism which Jesus was when he came into Galilee saying, "Repent."

To stress this necessity as primary and preliminary is in line with historical processes which have produced far-reaching political and economic change. Any attempt to make changes is liable to develop into mere futile riots, if there has not gone before a long educational process which saps the foundations of the power and prestige of the existing order. It is the critical analysis of the *status quo* from the point

of view of another scale of values which makes the possibility of change. This necessity of the creation of the new climate of opinion is stressed with many historical illustrations by George Soule in his *The Coming American Revolution:*

> As the unseen and unrecognized revolution takes form, the world of ideas ferments. Evils of the old order are attacked. Its religious or philosophic sanctions are undermined, its values are transformed. Satire exposes the position of the old rulers, it reveals the corruption of individuals. This intellectual activity gradually destroys both the popular loyalty to the old regime, and, to a large extent, its faith in itself. The intellectuals also throw out new dogmas which in time, and to influential groups of people, come to seem more genuine and reliable than the old. In devious and confused ways this intellectual ferment makes people conscious of what is going on. It creates the mental apparatus which is necessary as a tool to bring a new society out of the old.[2]

It is that stage of the creation of a new mind, a criticism of our ways of life from the standpoint of the values primary to Jesus, that we are in. To that task resources of mind and strength must be consecrated.

It is not an easy task. Perhaps success in it is not even probable. But the first task of Christianity in the Roman world was not easy and success was not even dimly probable. The very dimensions of the task, however, too great for human effort, brought a

[2] George Soule, *The Coming American Revolution.* The Macmillan Company, New York, 1934.

reliance on the resources of God. It was mad to try it, and in the madness lay the power.

John Galsworthy records this bit of history from Seville, Spain. "On the eighth day of July, 1401, the dean and chapter of Seville, assembled in the court of the elms and solemnly resolved, 'Let us build here a church so great that those who come after us will think us mad even to have dreamed of it.' "

Such madness is in the apostolic succession. Whenever Christian faith ceases to have a touch of madness about it, a madness above probabilities and proof, it ceases to be Christian and degenerates into pedestrian common sense. Often in history and often today it has been just that. Many have followed a very different set of resolutions. They have counseled: "Let us build a faith so reasonable, so sane, so full of sweetness and light, that it will commend itself to all sensible men. Not too high, not too deep, not too hard—just sensible." So also with the endeavor and goal. One would think that the only text which many churchmen had ever read in the Bible was this: "Let your moderation be known to all men." They have let their moderation be known—immoderately! They have said, "Let us build something which fits the background, so adapted to realities that no one will question our good sense." And verily they have had their reward. No one has ever questioned it! No one has ever said to them as Festus said to Paul, "Thou art mad."

That touch of madness is the ultimate credential of a genuine Christianity. The charge of attempting

the improbable is not something to be avoided, but to be sought.

May the Church look out on the world with the touch of madness which impels it to resolve to build, with God's help, a society so great, so Christian, "that those who come after us will think us mad even to have dreamed of it."

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Mr 16 '39
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S 21 '43
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